

In the land of the beautiful trout

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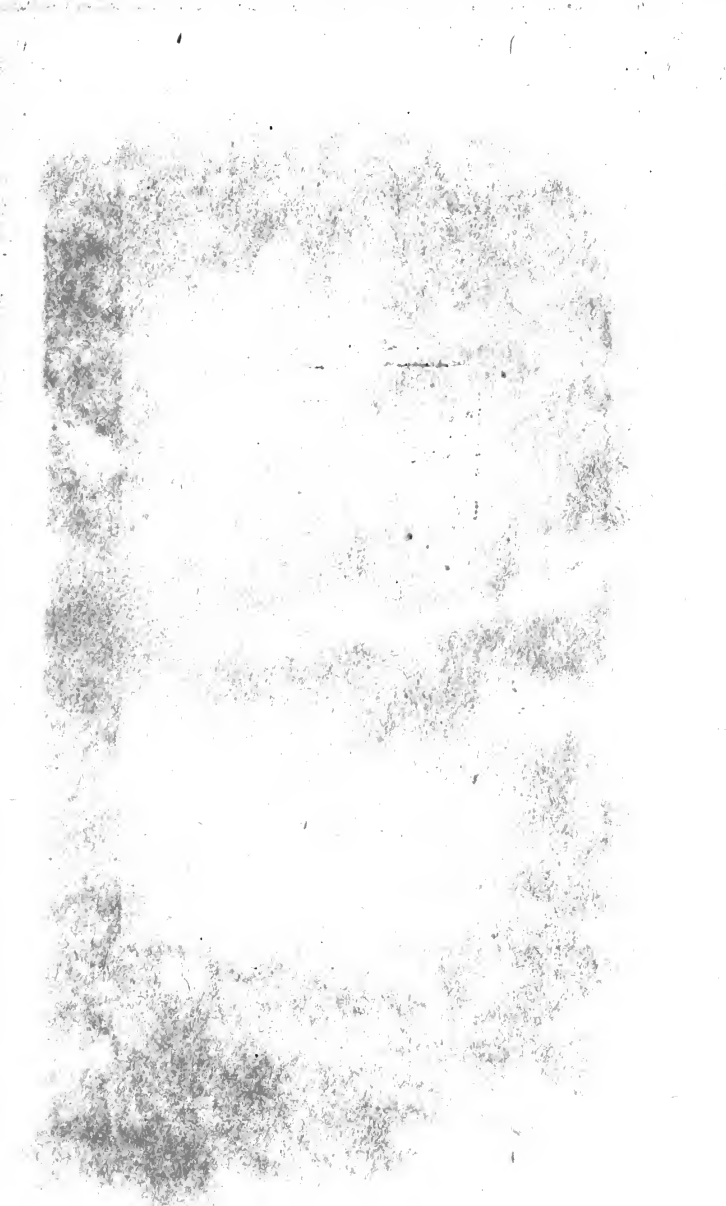
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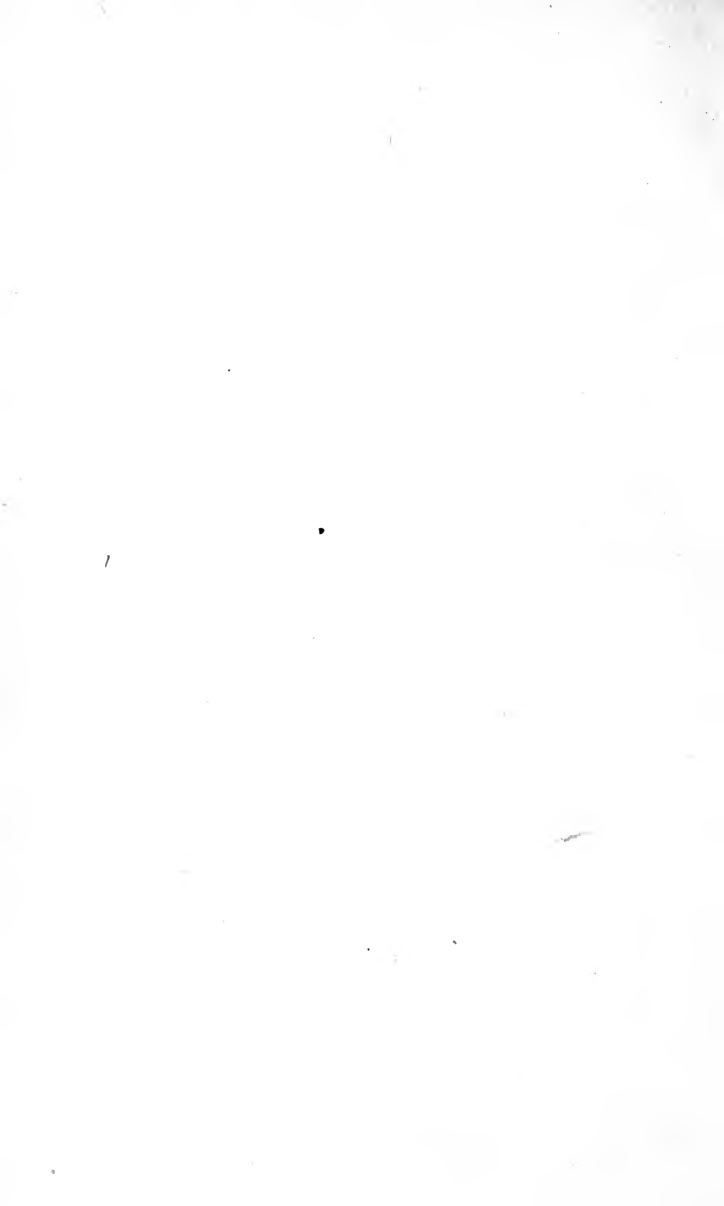
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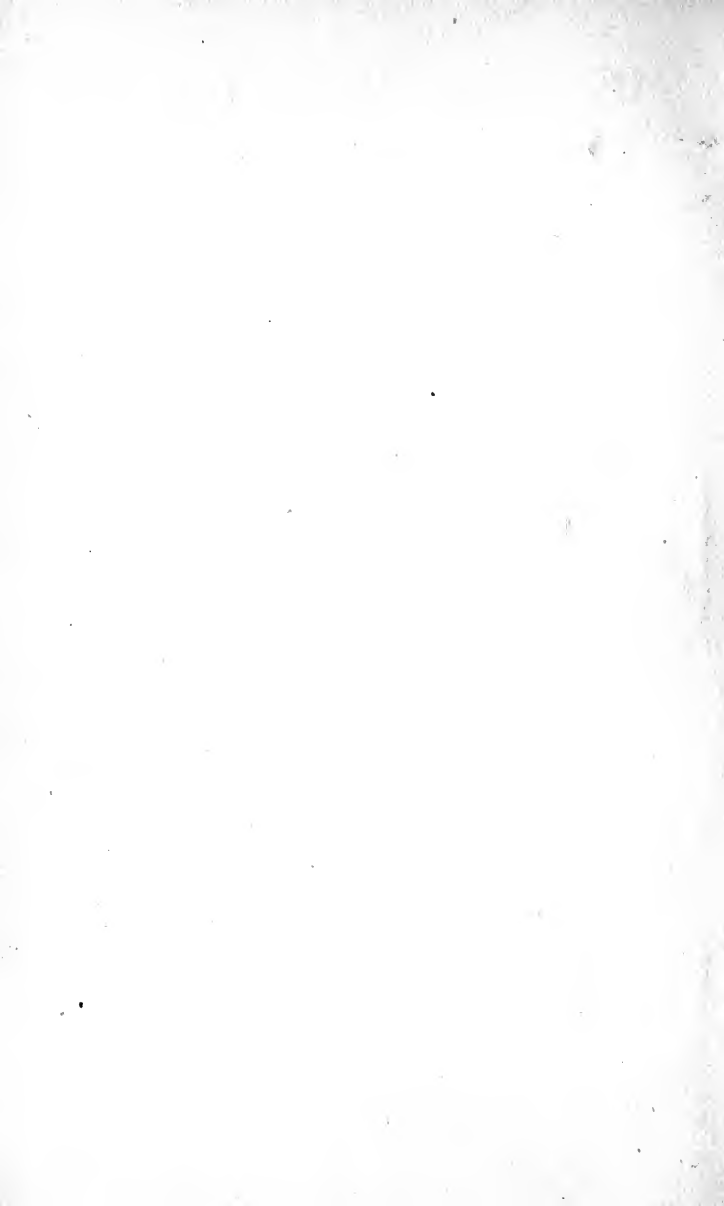




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IN THE LAND OF THE
BEAUTIFUL TROUT



IN THE LAND OF THE BEAUTIFUL TROUT

BY

ARTHUR TYSILIO JOHNSON



T. N. FOULIS

13 & 15 FREDERICK STREET
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To
E. N. M.
A TOKEN OF
FRIENDSHIP AND GRATITUDE



*" I climb the hill : from end to end
Of all the landscape underneath,
I find no place that does not breathe
Some gracious memory of my friend."*

ALFRED LORD TENNYSON,
In Memoriam.

" . . . I love any discourse of rivers and fishing;
the time spent in such discourse passes away very
pleasantly."

IZAAK WALTON in *The Compleat Angler*
and *Contemplative Man's Recreation*.

N O T E

THE thanks of Author and Publisher are due to those Editors who have so kindly given permission to reprint some of the essays in this volume.

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THE AWAKENING YEAR

*"The cuckoo-throb, the heart-beat of the Spring ;
The rose-bud's blush that leaves it as it grows
Into the full-eyed, fair, unblushing rose ;*

*.
The furtive flickering streams to light reborn
' Midairs new-fledged and valorous lusts of morn,
While all the daughters of the daybreak sing."*

DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI,
House of Life.





WITH A NINE-FOOT ROD IN WALES



O suggest a day's angling on an overgrown, boisterous mountain-stream, even on one of April's choicest days, would, perhaps, be considered little short of folly by many who have never experienced the delights nor learned the art of handling a delicate nine-foot rod weighing a few ounces. But I have at least satisfied my own feelings upon the matter, and would rather spend a day in taking

16 WITH A NINE-FOOT

a dozen or two wily mountain troutlets, that have a fight and pluck unequalled for their size, than the half-dozen lethargic monsters of two or three pounds which are as lazy as the streams they live in. The very obstacles that the mountain burn presents in the form of rock, bush, and hard climbing, the shyness of the trout, and the wind that blows in gusts this way and that in the deep gorges, only add zest to the sport, and make the hard-earned bag the dearer.

I can well remember one February day in North Wales which afforded sufficient incident to make what was the "first" of that season a memorable one. It had rained heavily throughout the night, and the little stream became for the time-being a murky torrent. Its waters hissed and boiled as they gushed between the rocky banks. Huge boulders, water-worn and gray, that had resisted the floods of a score of years were

dislodged from their sockets and overturned by the force of the flood. Listening, one could hear beneath the swish of the surface, beneath the steady roar of the falls, a deep rumbling sound emanating from those old crags, at last disturbed, now chafing and groaning in their efforts to stand their ground. Smaller stones and gravel were uncere- moniously hustled, like bits of cork, from one place to another, and now and then the trunk of a tree would shoot down the rapids like an Indian's canoe. It was evident that until noonday there would be no possibility of fishing, so I had ample time to renew my acquaintance with the old-fashioned, white-washed inn that stood in the village street overlooking the stream. Entering its only public room, I commenced putting a cast together, so that everything should be ready when the water permitted a start to be made. The two

chosen flies, and a six-foot cast of finely-tapered hair, were soaking in a tumbler of water, when the sunlight, which glinted on the tinsel and hackle, was, for a moment, obstructed by a figure passing the window. Immediately afterwards a man was standing at the door of the bar-room. He was one of the light-haired type of Welshman, and, although rather above the average height, his sloping shoulders and somewhat hollow chest gave one the impression that he was of lighter build than he actually was. His face was small but elongated, and a red-brown beard followed the line of his chin and stood well out from his chest, exposing a lean, scraggy neck. His upper lip was shaven, and the one remaining fang-like tooth, although useless for all other purposes, still gripped an ancient pipe. His cheek-bones were high, and the small gray eyes were deeply set, yet bright and lively. On

his head was a dilapidated bowler hat of antique style, surrounded by a deep mourning band, and he wore a black semi-frock coat and a nondescript pair of trousers. The first three inches of a "two-foot rule," which stood out of a long thigh-pocket, and some sawdust in his beard told you what the man's trade was at a glance. He was not, however, only the village carpenter, but the undertaker—the figure-head of the funerals—which latter are loved by Taffy, and made the occasion for much psalm-singing, merry-making and feasting. He was something more—a really keen fisherman, one who could make a neat fly-rod as well as use one; and he was, above all, a most stupendous liar. He delighted to relate impossible stories of sporting days and swear to their truthfulness and accuracy. He would repeat them so often, of an evening over pipes and beer that he not only began to

thoroughly believe in them himself, but he made many converts who were at one time incredulous scoffers.

He greeted me that morning with a beaming smile of cordiality, for there existed between us a common bond of friendship. Amos, for that was his name, had first taught me to handle a rod, and it was he who initiated me into the mysteries of the gentle art. Having shaken off the effects of the previous night's carouse, he fell to contemplating the flies.

"Well, indeed ! you are right to-day, sir ; you will be sure to make a good catch," he said, in the characteristic accent, emphasising his r's and changing his ch's into s's.

"I feel pretty safe with the Palmer so long as the sun continues out," I replied, "but was doubtful of the March Brown."

"Oh ! she will be all right," was the

comforting answer ; “ there wass a tremendous cloud of them on the watter, quite early, too.”

At that point the moss-green bowler was lifted off, and the coarse cast which encircled it carefully scrutinised by those cunning eyes. The flies were the same both in pattern and size as those which I had selected, and I felt gratified, if not a little proud, that I had made the same choice as Amos, my old master in the art, had done.

The stream by mid-day was in a condition that promised the best of sport. The pools were a warm coppery tint, and the water became flecked with bright gold as it splashed over the rocks, or shot from one level to another. The bubbles collected into the eddies, and there, swirling round in ever-narrowing circles, built themselves up into fantastic piles of snowy foam. There was a slight breeze blowing up-stream, almost

unnoticeable but for the willow-bushes ahead, which showed the silver-gray under-surfaces of their leaves. The banks were so overgrown that there was no choice but to step from stone to stone in mid-water, or to crawl along one side, and a free cast was an impossibility even with the shortest of rods and tackle. Overhead, behind, in front, and on either side were suspicious-looking branches ever ready to embrace one's cast if it happened to swish a few inches out of its intended course. To get "fast" to that trailing bramble growing out of the shelving rock on the opposite side, would mean a fly, if not more, lost, for who would dare to attempt a rescue with such an insecure footing? The rocks are water-polished and lubricated with a green slime which would speedily hasten a too venturesome angler feet first into eight or ten feet of swirling water.

To successfully land a quarter-pound

trout (and they seldom run larger in such streams) taxes the skill of the most experienced. The fish takes the fly slyly, there being scarcely a ripple on the surface as he sucks it down ; but the moment he feels himself held, the line hisses through the water as he darts from bank to bank. Any moment he may free himself by turning round a stone, rushing through the roots of an alder or under a floating log. He fights for liberty with an astonishing tenacity and endurance, and not unfrequently breaks away down-stream, leaping the little cascades and displaying his gold and silvery sides as he is buffeted about in the broken water. It is then that the slender hair cast will be tried ; it is then that the skill of the angler will be proved.

I had left Amos far behind, and was fishing a long narrow pool that can only be approached by the angler standing astride the small but heavy fall at its

foot. The rushing water poured down the narrow channel between my extended legs, while my feet were firmly planted on a stone on either side. A trout weighing about half a pound rose to the Palmer in a leisurely way at the head of the pool, and a short, heavy pull told me he was hooked. Down he went to the bottom, and then up again to the surface. He broke across this way and then that, until apparently satisfied that there was only one way of escape, and, to my astonishment, he swam straight towards me. He positively refused to be headed back, and as he came nearer and nearer the faster I had to reel up. Suddenly he made a dash and went down the rapid between my legs like a meteor. The supple rod yielded, the reel whirled as the line flew out, but I was powerless. With my back to the fish, the line between my legs, a none too firm foothold, and an uncomfortable feeling that

every moment the cast would snap, I became possessed of a strange sensation of utter helplessness which is more than I can describe. I could not even turn to look round, but I felt that the fish was on, and that he was floating in the current.

Then my spirits sank, for the rod sprang back and the line fell limp upon the water. Feeling now assured that the cast had at last given, I got on to a more secure position and began winding up. But there, nearly twenty yards below me, was the faithful Amos sprawling along the trunk of an overhanging alder tree, the fish in one hand and his hat, which had done duty as a landing-net, in the other. Now he was endeavouring to "land" himself by a kind of backward shuffle along the branch. The trout had been hooked "foul" in the back, just under the dorsal fin, hence his extraordinary tactics and my inability to head him back into the

pool when he prepared for his final rush.

“Well, indeed, I wass never see such a divvle of a fis(h)!” was the only remark my deliverer vouchsafed; but the story, having been related so often in the village inn, has since come to be almost unrecognisable.

The afternoon sun was now out of sight beyond the western hills, although it was still shining far away in the valley beneath us, eastwards. The evening air was making itself felt, and the trout were suddenly silent. The stream so gay an hour ago, so warm and golden in the sunlight, now became gray and sullen, and the little trout moved from the shallows to greater depths. I had done, as I thought, fairly well for a first day, having nine good ones—not to mention having caught innumerable small fry that are always a source of annoyance in such streams. The best fish had all

taken the Palmer. The March Brown they would have nothing to do with, and this struck me as being more extraordinary after what Amos had said. Was it possible that he had played me false?—Amos, who had been my teacher and guide in all things pertaining to insect or finny lore. He always told his “whackers” with such a ring of honesty that they became quite a part of the man, and, after all, they had done no one any harm. “Fourteen years ago,” I said, almost aloud, to myself, “it is since I had my first lesson with a coarse, home-made outfit—still a cherished ornament on the walls of my room—and my red-whiskered friend.” During the earlier part of that time I had often managed to make “top score,” much to Amos’ delight; but latterly I had had a growing feeling that he no longer considered me a novice, but an equal, if not a rival, in the art, and that he would never fail to

exercise all the craftiness and ingenuity he possessed so that he might come home with the heavier bag. At that moment Amos approached, and, after giving me a quick, searching glance, sat down on a mossy stone and proceeded to empty his pockets. These were large and useful, capable of carrying either a hare or a jack-plane with equal ease. One by one the trout were laid out on the grass, a shining heap of glistening beauties, touched here and there with spots of brightest crimson. When he had finished counting, and had said "thirty-four," at the same time looking at me in an inquiring way as if to read my thoughts, I guessed that I was right. He had employed some means other than those which he had recommended me to use, and, with nothing more than an expression of satisfaction at the result of his day's sport, he proceeded to his rod. It had been left some distance

away, and I watched him remove the cast and entwine it round his hat. When he returned I looked up at the flies, and, sure enough, they were the identical ones he had started with. His eyes caught mine for a moment, and again, as if comprehending what was passing in my mind, he said, "I was tell you the Marrch Brrown would do just grrand. I did catch every one with her—yes, indeed." When told it had done nothing for me, he feigned surprise, carefully compared my pattern with his own, held them in the water side by side, and soon discovered some minute difference which he declared was quite sufficient to account for the difference in our respective "baskets." I knew too much, however, to be "gulled" to any such extent, and time proved me to be right.

Amos was "drouthy" when we got back to our wayside club, and before the

evening was far spent an unrecorded number of mugs of beer had had an unloosening effect upon his tongue. He unfolded the story of the day's sport to the landlady, who bought his fish, and in anything but a concise and lucid manner related how he had used some "special" flies of his own make, now attached to a cast carefully hidden under the broad mourning band that encircled his hat! And no doubt the good woman, with the unsuspecting nature of her kind, believed all she was told! But not satisfied with that, and having, as he thought, hoodwinked me also, he proceeded to entertain his most trusty friends in disconnected whisperings with the "*real* truth" of the affair! What that was, even if it were ever made known, is best left unrecorded. I left him sitting in the thick tobacco smoke, "gettin' fou and unco happy," his gray eyes lustrous with excitement, the bow-

ler hat tipped back off his forehead, that inevitable pipe wobbling in its insecure grip, and his bony hands emphasising every point in the tales which only a most outrageous imagination could ever conceive.



FISHERMEN AND FLIES



It has never fallen to my lot to hear discussed the respective merits of the various forms of angling. And if it should so happen that I found myself entangled in that net from which there is so little hope of escape, may I never fish again! To draw comparisons, for example, between the dough-nut type of bottom-fisher and the quality of his special sport on the one hand, and the man who wields eighteen feet of greenheart against a stiff moorland breeze on the other, would be verily odious indeed. Yet it is said of anglers, "By their tackle shall ye know them."

When the park-lake fisherman, in fond anticipation, rolls his little lump of dough between finger and thumb, the small boys who have collected round him gaze with awe-struck faces and

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think, perhaps, of some day when they, too, shall sit behind a bamboo rod and have their dirty little lumps of dough. The bottom-fisher himself contemplates with wonder the mysterious ways of the trout-fisher, who, again, in his turn casts a look of commiseration towards his humbler brother of the duck pond whom the tame ducks worry so. But the angler of the trout stream is often far from being the object of such complete contentment that some may take him to be, for, even as the bottom-fisher may aspire towards trout, so he, the trout-fisher, especially if he be poor, may nurse the hope that he will one day land a mighty salmon, or have a gaff-armed gillie, rugged of face and sandy-whiskered, to do it for him.

Of all the articles of the angler's faith, no one is held in such veneration as that which ordains that certain flies shall and must be used under given conditions,

or in well-defined areas; which is to say, that the trout is possessed of a deep knowledge of entomology and a fine discretion in the matter of taste. And although that faith has been attacked, undermined, and denounced as a delusion, an unreal thing begotten of the tackle-maker or the superstitious; although Herbert Spencer went for it with his accustomed vigour, and bequeathed it to Mr Lang and others to finally extinguish; although most modern anglers are heterodox enough to spell that faith with a small f and to boldly contend that, equipped with half a dozen flies or so, one may, with proper skill, catch as many trout (or salmon) as he who invades the riverside with the contents of a small tackle-shop and a section of his fishing library,—the faith still lives.

Few of us when on a fishing holiday can resist a pilgrimage to the musty little shop — generally of stationery, iron-

mongery, and fancy goods combined—over which the wizened, bespectacled vendor of “local flies” presides. With the patience peculiar to our kind we suffer the old man to discourse at length on his antique favourites, which, one by one, are tediously disentangled from a mass of others reposing in a drawer or portmanteau-like wallet of great age. There is a ready history attached to each pattern. Each one has its specified area of renown over which it holds undisputed sway. Each one has some stirring anecdote at its back, some special adaptability to the moods of the changeable elements to recommend it. And as we duck our heads under the tin fish which dangles over the cobbled pavement by way of advertisement, we have a sneaking regard for what we have heard, and determine to give some of the purchases a trial. The vision of one such “tackle-maker,” owl-faced, dilapidated, almost

mothy—the sort of man that one can never imagine ever having been a boy—who with long claw-like hands once tied his own flies upon gut of his own manufacture, is a memory one would in these days unwillingly lose. He was never known to fish, yet his knowledge of the art was extraordinary, and the stream that to-day tumbles noisily past the place where he sleeps seemed as familiar to him in every bend and corner as the view down the village street seen from the window of his dingy shop.

Then there is another rustic celebrity in the art—often as not a diminutive hunchback—who, whether we ignore his faithful attachment to “local” patterns and refute his arguments, which are so often opposed to every canon of scientific fishing, still catches fish. Who has not seen him making his way upstream, ever before us, moving in and out between the boulders with the jerky,

impetuous gait of a water-wagtail, whipping the little pools with unpardonable violation of every nicety of the art? Most of us, perhaps, only too often. Yet these two characters are the trustees of much that we anglers revere and believe, although we are not always so ready to admit it. They unconsciously demonstrate that a few flies used on proper occasions are all that the trout-fisher needs, that one fly of a given class does just about as well as another when fish are feeding, excepting on such occasions as the rise of the May-fly or March Brown. The village angler backs his arguments in favour of his local patterns by the fact that he is seldom disappointed in a day's sport. He contends too—and here, perhaps, with some reason—that his flies, being more like those which they are intended to imitate, are more likely to catch fish than those monstrosities of the tackle-maker, some of which

bear no resemblance to any living creature. He is ready to refute one's statement that a March Brown made in Oxford Street would be as deadly a lure as one tied in his own village, even though they had a brotherly likeness to one another. But the truth of the matter is usually this. His favourite patterns are nearly always on the cast. They are there, as it were, by inheritance and birthright. It would be extraordinary if they did not catch more fish than those which are given only an occasional trial, so that the value put upon them is a purely fictitious one. Then there is prejudice. This local sportsman is possessed of an inherited dislike for anything new.

There is much piscatorial philosophy in that delightful picture which *Punch* gave us some time ago of the irascible old gentleman who, after having fished all day, after having tried every available fly he possesses, throws his book into

the stream with a malediction and exclaims, "There! Take your choice!" If a trout will not rise when he is made a fair offer, there is nothing that will induce him to do so. You may dabble the most coquettish Coch y bondu across the wind-ruffled water above him. You may tickle his nose suggestively with a most attractive Black Spider; yet he remains in stolid indifference to all offers. But half an hour hence, perhaps, the same fish will be feeding with the characteristic greed of his kind upon whatever presents itself in the shape of food, provided it is not extravagantly unreal in nature or appearance. Last summer two little four-ounce trout were caught in a mountain brook in quick succession, one with a tiny, black midge-like fly, which had been put on the cast by way of experiment, and the other with a Palmer of gaudy dress. The water was clear, and it is worthy of note that the

second fish had two half-swallowed worms in its gullet when it took the fly.

While, from the point of view of mere sport, there is much needless worrying over this side of the subject, on the other hand there is a deal that might be said in favour of a fly-book that is well furnished without being vulgarly so. Tackle-makers may seduce us if they will. They do so at least once every year, and we submit because we rather like it. To turn over the familiar parchment, whether we are by the riverside with the scent of spring in the air or dreaming of days past and to come by the wintry fireside, is to inspire one's imagination anew. Flies are pretty, attractive things, and we owe not a little gratitude to those who have created them. If we were to weed out all these beauties (perish the thought!) and leave only that practical half-dozen, so plain and dowdy, much of the old flavour of fishing would go with them.

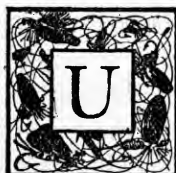
Breathes there an angler with "soul so dead" who would part with his Ronald even though he were offered Izaak Walton in his stead? To suffer that wholesome connection between the trout fisher's sport and entomology to be broken would be to throw bankruptcy in the face of a well-tried friend. The angler would be scorning his very birthright in feigning indifference to the May-fly's story or to the life of that terrible creature which at one of the stages in its unenviable career is well called Creeper. And the fly-fisher will yield to none in the beauty and refinement of his tackle. With him there is no messy baiting of hooks, no impaling of luckless worms, no pickling of happy minnows. For my part, although I am not squeamish nor addicted to crying cruelty, I confess I do not like these things. There is something in the wriggle of the worm that repels.

THE WET-FLY ANGLER

A SKETCH

“And this is happy April, fair maid of sun and showers,

With her heart filled with music and both her hands with flowers.”



P a narrow mountain lane, early on a spring morning, an angler is easily sauntering. The hedges droop with their load of may, and the banks below are rich with cowslips, prim-roses, and violets. There is a green, refreshing shade under the young foliage of beech and sycamore, and in woodland ways, where ferns are unfolding their velvet fronds, wild hyacinths are covering the ground with a haze of blue. Many of the home birds are too busy providing for hungry families to indulge in music now, but the morning air is ringing with the voices of summer mi-

THE WET-FLY ANGLER 43

grants. The cuckoo "tells her name to all the hills," happy swallows are singing as they fly. Garrulous whitethroats in the thick undergrowth of the hedges, and cheery little willow-wrens high up in the tall trees, newcomers all, are claiming attention.

Up, up the angler goes until the stream that roared and gushed between steep banks, heavily wooded, in its lower reaches, widens out upon its moorland course and flows in a succession of merry little cascades and easy-going pools. The water is slightly tinted with last night's rain, but the bright sky is mirrored upon its glittering face. And far away through the moorland, yet brown and bare, save for the gorse that blazes in patches of gold among the sober heather, it winds, an ever-narrowing line of light, until it is lost in a mist of blue that curtains the mountains of the west. Rills, cold and crystal clear, filter through

the peat ; and every angler knows that there is no water that blends so sweetly with the contents of one's flask as that which has its source in some moorland spring.

To put together the split-cane of nine feet six inches, and to attach the casting line of silky fineness, equipped with a March Brown and a Red Spinner, is the work of a few moments. Soon the cast glints in the sunlight and falls like a silver hair at the tail-end of the pool above that in which the angler is standing. A couple of diminutive parr make a dart at it, but fortunately do not get hooked. No respectable trout will be among that fugitive crew, so more line is let out, and the next cast is made so that the March Brown alights in deep water, just where the main current swirls round towards one of the banks, forming an eddy of spinning foam. Immediately a fish is on, and, after a brave show of fight and

endurance, is somewhat unceremoniously "landed" into the angler's hands.

The next pool is now felt, and in the broken water at the edge of the current a couple of golden flanks gleam for a moment in the sun. Another cast, and again the two fish rise, one of them in due time being safely creeled.

There is no surplus energy to waste, no solemn flogging of every foot of water, no casting done at random. The angler knows where to place his leading fly. He casts a long line and a good one, and the fly goes where it is intended to go.

Here, again, there is a long, rocky stretch of water which boils and gurgles among mossy boulders. There is only one spot where a fish is likely to be, and, to enable him to reach it unseen, the angler must crawl and stoop between the rocks that are heaped in a confused mass on either bank. Safely hidden, the fish-

erman whisks his line through the air, the rod being handled as deftly as if it were a cedar pencil, and the March Brown is sucked under the instant it alights upon the dark, still corner of the pool. Almost simultaneously there is another tug. The Red Spinner, too, has found a victim. The two fish plunge into the deep water under the shelving rocks, and struggle out again into the galloping current. They fight in the heavy water of mid-stream, and tug, one this way and one that, with a power that is remarkable for such small creatures. Now they make down-stream together, and the little rod is tried to its utmost limit ; but again they break away in different directions, and dive among the rocks that are scattered about the central channel. Should the line scrape against one of the stones, or slacken an instant, one or both fish will assuredly be lost ; but, with a momentary feeling of relief, the reel

whirrs out as the fish once more rush up to their dark hiding-place. There, for a few brief seconds, they are quiet, but the angler is prepared for that renewed energy with which they again commence their valiant battle for life. But their runs are becoming shorter, and the slowly clicking reel tells of a strength that is rapidly giving out. Flashes, like gleams of light, come and go upon the surface of the water, and gently, the line rapidly shortening, the fish drift this way and that, as they are being led slowly down the stream. There is no landing-net, for such appliances cannot be carried long distances on the off-chance of their being really necessary ; and when the angler is pondering as to how he is to land these two prizes that have made such a plucky fight, a piece of luck, passing the common luck of fishermen, befalls him. The fish drift together, become entangled, and approach the shallow water, clinging

together, exhausted. Just as they reach the fisherman's legs, and are within touch, he gently puts his hands beneath the pair, and tosses them out so that they fall on the dry gravel between the rocks.

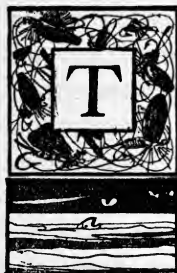
The brace did not much exceed eight ounces, but how they fought ! Anyone who knows anything of the game spirit of a mountain trout, his enduring vigour, the perils of the rocky current, the force of the cascade, and the other obstacles with which the streams abound, need not be told that this old-school "chuck and chance it" angler, as he is contemptuously called by the ignorant, is a skilful sportsman to the core, and that even one of these game little trout—let alone two—will bring out all that is best in the great sport of angling.



IN THE DAYS OF THE MAY-FLY

“From the recesses of the silent lake
Upshoots the pebble-cradled, soft Green-Drake:

Next look along the silver-pebbled strand,
The Stone-fly from its shell now crawls to land.”



HERE is still some evidence to show that the two classes of anglers—wet and dry fly advocates—have not yet done attempting to draw “odious” comparisons between the merits of

their respective sports. I say “attempting,” because to compare the two methods is as impossible as it is ridiculous. A dry fly, for example, may excel where a wet fly would be a failure, and the contrary is no less true. A low, crystal-clear chalk stream, meandering its unruffled course through a level country, is the paradise of the former, but to the champions of the latter (excepting on

rare occasions) it has few attractions. The wet fly on a tumbling mountain brook, on good days and indifferent, will afford fair sport when the other would be utterly out of place. There are many streams in the West where such a thing as a May-fly is seldom seen, even under the most congenial circumstances, and where to float a fly on the orthodox principle would be scarcely possible. The Stone-fly, it is true, comes in for a while, but there are many fishermen who never take advantage of its short visit. Neither can one assert any positive opinion as to which is the more scientific and more fascinating of the two sports. The dry-fly enthusiast, kneeling to the gods of his art on the banks of a translucent Hampshire chalk stream, is not a more cunning observer, not a more scientific angler, than the man who fishes the rocky moorland streams of Scotland or Wales. That finer fish are taken with

the floating fly under certain conditions is no doubt true; but the trout naturally attain a larger size in the rivers where such flies are used, and the anglers go for big fish, and big fish only will they take. Yet many a wet-fly fisherman knows full well how, in the early weeks of the season, some of his best catches are often made with a diminutive *sunken* spider—the direct opposite to the butterfly type of lure. And this leads one to wonder once again why some owners of fishing rights should object to sunken flies being used. Why should not the angler who sinks his fly with a leaden shot be every bit as honest a sportsman as he who floats the larger imitation by providing it with a body of cork and anointing it with oil? But rather than indulge further in these controversial questions, let us briefly observe the ways of the dry-fly fisherman.

It is a glorious morning in early June.

The sun is in his most generous mood, and over the fresh green reeds and blossoming irises which fringe the water dragon-flies in burnished armour of copper and green are poised on scintillating wings in the still air. Unseen warblers are making merry in the tangle of bramble and meadow-sweet ; the marsh, where the homely corncrake is uttering her vibrating notes, is starred with wild orchises, marsh marigolds, and broad-rayed daisies, and the musk and water-mint fill the heavy air with a drowsy fragrance. It is the time of roses, of summer's prime.

Presently, in the green shade beneath a hawthorn bush, the water is dimpled by something that rises to the surface. At a distance it is not unlike a chip of muddy, decayed wood ; but almost immediately it splits from end to end, a May-fly emerges, and, resting upon its old shell and stretching out its beautiful,

transparent wings to the breeze, sails slowly down the stream like a tiny yacht. For twelve months, down in the dark and earthy river-bed, the May-fly has been undergoing its metamorphosis, passing through strange and ugly phases, but now it has risen into the genial sunlight of a June day, a creature with a rare delicacy of form and colour, and invested with a life-history that is full of a beautiful mystery. Yet it is born to live but a day. Of the countless hosts that flutter on wings of prismatic hues over the water on a warm summer morning, very few will remain until afternoon. As often as not, the May-flies are snatched by the greedy trout before they have left their "old husk," and those that are in the air fall a prey to flycatchers, martins, and swallows. Even the farmyard sparrows and starlings sometimes come to join in this great festival of the English fisherman's year.

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In the quaint language of an old writer, it has been prettily written of the May-fly :

“One moment in the sun she fans her wings,
And smooths to roundness all their mazy rings ;
Then, Nature to the summer air she springs.
Beware, O Beauty ! in the streamlet lies
A gay-robed gallant with adoring eyes ;
Meet not his kiss, for she he kisseth dies.”

On the bank yonder the dry-fly fisher sits with field-glasses covering a stretch of water. He has observed the “rise” of the fly, and his object is now to locate the movement of a big fish ; for the smaller fry are leaping and frolicking all over the stream, and cramming themselves to their brown, shiny lips with the May-flies. It is hot—very hot—and the flies that buzz about the fern torment the patient watcher’s perspiring face.

Suddenly the field-glasses are encased and the angler, having noticed the type

of fly with which the water abounds, and attached an imitation to his cast, applies some paraffin to it so as to ensure its floating correctly. Now he makes a wide detour across the marsh and approaches the water some fifty yards away from where he was seated. He treads softly as he leisurely walks through the flowery grass. Nearing the stream he stoops, then crouches stealthily nearer and nearer to the earth, until he is almost hidden from view by the tall vegetation. "Upon thy belly shalt thou go," is one of the canons of the dry-fly fisher's art, and the action of our friend is that of the writhing serpent. Now the very earth perspires, and the hot, moist air is laden with the almost insufferable scent of innumerable flowers. A warm, sweet odour of elder and meadow-sweet puffs along, and gaily-coloured wild bees drone lazily by.

There is a conveniently low alder

bush, with broad leaves of burdock and dainty hedge parsley ahead, and behind these the angler gingerly rises to one knee. He examines his fly again, and studies the circumstances under which it is to be placed. The surface of the sluggish stream is dimpled again, and another May-fly disappears below the surface. Even the water seems affected by the oppression of the prevailing heat, and it flows past with an oily ease. There is a tuft of weed and a projecting stick to be avoided, and the sun must not cast the shadow of the uplifted rod across the stream. The fly must be so dropped that the effect of the current upon the line will not cause it to "drag." These things being duly considered, the angler, with an imaginary cast or two, measures the distance between himself and the fish to a nicety, and, scarcely a foot above the trout's lair, the fly falls like a little feather. It cocks its wings

and sails gaily down-stream. As it approaches the spot where the fish is feeding there is a thrilling moment of suspense, but this time it passes along apparently unnoticed. Another try is made. Now it alights a little nearer the trout's nose, and a trifle heavier than before ; and no sooner has it touched the surface than there is a deft tightening of the line, the fly sinks, the rod yields, and the reel whirrs out as the fish makes down-stream. The fun has begun, and the trout fights with the vigour of a lively grilse. He is a heavy fish and a cunning, and if there is a bunch of reeds, a tangle of willow roots or a collection of driftage, he will make for it ; and woe betide the delicate cast that gets twisted round one or other of these obstacles ! He flops about the surface and dives into the depths. He threatens to run aground in the shallows, or makes a straight, headlong rush to another part of the

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stream. Every device which heredity and cunning have given him—and trout are more clever than they used to be—he employs to shake off that something which holds him fast, yet which gives to every strain and yields to every motion, until exhausted, when the click of the reel tells the tale of victory, and the angler has forgiven those persecuting flies, the oppressive heat, and the long wait he endured before the rise began.



IN THE LEAFY MONTHS

“As the wind, wandering over the sea, takes from each wave an invisible portion, and brings to those on shore the ethereal essence of ocean, so the air lingering among the woods and hedges—green waves and billows—becomes full of the fine atoms of Summer.”

RICHARD JEFFERIES, *The Pageant of Summer.*







THE SUMMER TROUT



WHEN the rhythmic murmur of the distant mowing-machine has announced the beginning of harvest, and the thick foliage of summer hangs dark and green over the stream, many a trout-fisher will hang up his rod until the September floods have cleared the water of its accumulation of moss and weed, and the trout have regained some of the energy and appetite of earlier days.

But how many brother anglers are

there who, all through the spring and early summer, have to be content to smell the trout afar off, and take their holiday when the schools have broken up and the rivers have dwindled down to their lowest level? They are an enthusiastic lot, these fishermen, who leave their wives and children to the care of the sands of the sea, and betake themselves to that waterside club "where the women cease from troubling and the wicked are at rest": where, also, they labour assiduously from morn till dusk, whipping the crystal pools, in which not so much as a fin shows itself, struggling over boulder and briar, mountain and moor, with a tremendous, but not discreditable, expenditure of energy, buoyed up by the eternal hope that the next cast may induce a fish to rise.

The sun scorches them from above, the heat from the sun-baked rocks smites them from below, there is a very plague

of flies, and even the cheery whitethroat in the willows seems to be oppressed with the lassitude of summer, and sings in a less lively tone. The fierce rays of light penetrate the clear water and illumine the gravel that lies at the bottom of the deepest pools. The surface of the stream is as smooth as glass, save where the trickling current—all that is left of the amber flood of spring—with a faint rippling song twists its idle way between the stones of the river-bed. One might as well angle on the dusty roads, but our ardent friends work off their abundance of excess energy with a perseverance which is so tragically pitiful that it makes one feel hot and jaded to think of it.

Unwearily they plod their woeful way under the most unpropitious circumstances, and vainly, with all the forces of nature against them, hope to outwit the cunning trout—"a trout that is more sharp-sighted than any hawk, and more

watchful and timorous than your high-mettled merlin is bold. . . .” Some few give up the chase disappointed.

“In meek despondency they eye

The shrunken pools, the rainless sky,”

and tap the face of the barometer that aggravatingly oscillates at “Set Fair.” But the majority of these gallant anglers, who turn up every summer like birds of passage, will, after a day of dire tribulation and weariness, which they pretend not to feel, set out for the riverside under similar conditions on the morrow, as keen and as full of hope of sport as when they were about to wet the first line of the season.

There is not much wrong with the morals of men who will do that, and they deserve our deepest respect and sympathy. For is it not exceedingly hard, after a day of toil and trial, and no fish, to have to face a wife who you know did not expect you to catch any when you

set out, and the family of kiddies who did ? What feelings are those that we would so willingly suppress, and which intrude so persistently upon the mind, when the youngsters clamour round with questions and anxious glances, when they peer into your empty basket, dip into your waders, socks, and even your sodden brogues, until at last the faces are disappointed, and you feel that some of that firm, unquestioning faith the little chaps had in you has slipped away, that some of your prestige has been lost somewhere !

It is so hard, too, to find an excuse for a blank day that will satisfy everybody ; but when an afternoon on the rocks after crabs is suggested, or a boat, somelines, and mussels for bait are being talked about, and there is evident excitement among the brood, you may say that the smell of the sea-water makes you sick—not that that would deter you

for a moment from joining the party, but you have at last really devised a new scheme for circumventing the ways of the wily trout which cannot possibly fail, so that the next day you are again by the brook.

An angler, however, must not be too sensitive to trouble and ill-luck. Worse things than an empty creel, a disappointed family, the heat, and a plague of flies may await him. There are days when the tail fly of your cast will persist in hiding its barb in your tweed jacket, just between the shoulders, or, worse still, in such a part of your trousers that partial disrobement is necessary before it can be extricated. In your struggles to liberate yourself from either such ignominious situation, while you are glancing round to see that no one is looking, another hook becomes attached to your elbow, and a third runs into your ear. Having successfully got out of the diffi-

culty, you intend to try a new cast, and place it on a stone near by while you light a pipe. But the gusts of wind that have effectually disposed of your third match—and you have only two left—have also blown the cast into a tangle of brambles where to find it is impossible. On such days as these one is fortunate who does not, by stepping into an unseen hole, get some water into his waders, where it will gurgle and squeeze for liberty with such persistence that there is nothing for it but to remove brogues, socks, and waders, marvelling that such a little drop should prove so uncomfortable, and swearing at the trouble and loss of time it has involved. If you are not careful, a slippery stone may be the means of sitting you roughly down in three feet of water, and, in your efforts to save yourself, the top piece of the rod gets splintered and the line tied in a knot at the top of an alder-bush.

Begin a day with trials of this kind, and they will follow you about until evening, if you can endure them so long. If it is hot it is bad enough, but wind is worse ; and, in either case, to sit down and eat one's sandwiches — provided they haven't been lost on the way or left reposing on a bank two miles lower down — is a positive effort, and to fall back upon a faithful flask for relief does not always dispel the dejection and ill-luck that have accompanied you.

So great are the worries and troubles that sometimes—more particularly in these later days—beset the angler, that I once heard a friend, as keen a fisherman as ever wetted a line, in the darkness of despair, swear by all the rivers of the earth and all the waters under the earth that he would never fish again. He clinched his oath by taking the longest drink of whisky that I ever saw an angler swallow, and with a "Never again!" mut-

tered between his teeth, and a look at me that expressed as plainly as possible the words "Poor deluded fool!" he turned away. Next day, however, he was back again at the riverside—for such is the fascination of fishing!

Delightful as it is to snatch a good day's sport in July or August, when a heavy rainfall has washed clean the hot and dusty surface of the earth, when the air is as fresh as that of May, and the streams are swollen with a flood of that foamy pale-ale description so loved by fishermen, such days are like angels' visits, and if we would catch trout during the brief holiday that custom has ordained shall fall at the tail end of the summer, we must adapt ourselves to the conditions of the water that generally prevail at that season. We must not live in the vain hope that Jupiter Pluvius will turn away from his wrath, and to-morrow or next day make the mountain rills to rip-

ple with the merry laughter of spring waters, and the rivers to flow in a flood of golden brown bejewelled with silvery bubbles. And although we would not deprive the undaunted fisherman of the wholesome exercise and the pleasure of the toil that he experiences when in quest of the summer trout on an impossible day, I would suggest that many a one would be spared disappointment if he were to be content with other things until the "rise" comes on in the evening.

Let the summer sun blaze upon the flowery earth until the landscape pales beneath his brilliant rays, and, even as the trout are basking under the greenery of overhanging banks, let us wile away the hours in contentment, dozing in the grateful shade of the woods, or, better still, lying among the heather, offering burnt-offerings in the pipe of peace to the gracious beauty of the summer, and

listening to the legends the grim old mountains have to tell.

Although far away in the downy clouds, the skylark will accompany us with its heaven-sent melodies. The hum of bees will mingle with the gaiety of the rippling brook. The fragrance of heather and wild thyme, the refreshing odour of peat and green rushes, and the warm, sweet scent of gorse will blend with the shimmering atmosphere of summer that rises like incense from the purple moor.

Miles away, the blue sea stretches across the horizon, and we may dream of its idle ripples, ever curling and tossing themselves into running lines of foam. A little nearer, and the yellow sands of a tidal river are girt by fields of whitening grain and darkening woods, through which the white roads of the valley thread their winding ways. Here and there a wheat-stack gleams in the corner of a

field that has been stripped of its golden wealth, and amid the beauty and the riches of the summer earth the naked stubble speaks of the fulfilment of nature's promise, of the pathos that haunts the harvest of the year.

The declining sun now sheds a rosy light across the eastern hills, a wandering beetle drones past on its evening flight, and

"All the air a solemn stillness holds."

High up among the gray rocks a goat-sucker is hawking for moths, and its lonely voice trembles across the melancholy moor. But before the waters of the stream have mirrored the lingering evening light, their surface will be ruffled with the dimples and ripples of many rising trout.

With the silence of a water-vole, that slides into its aquatic home with neither flop nor splash, the big fish are feeding upon the unsuspecting sedge-flies in the

shadows of the reeds. In shallower and more open places the smaller trout are revelling in a cloud of gnats, and the angler, already prepared with the finest of casting lines and the lightest of rods, is enjoying the good sport that the evening rise affords. For an hour or two the fish will continue feeding with the appetite and energy of May. Almost every cast will move a fish, and the angler will be exhilarated by the delicious coolness of the evening, thrilled with the excitement of the rise, and his skill will not go unrewarded.

But suddenly as they began, the fish cease feeding. Whether the white mist that is creeping up the valley a mile away smites the stream with its chilly breath and bids the leaping trout be silent, or whether it is some other influence that thrills the water from estuary to moorland spring, it is certain that no poacher's dynamite charge ever more effectively

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checked the rise and smoothed the stream than the first damp touch of that fleecy veil of eventide invariably appears to do. To attempt to rise a trout after we have felt the cold, wet vapours of the dying day and heard the twittering bat—that swallow of the twilight—merrily chasing the gray-winged moth, is vanity and vexation. Better to reel up and turn our faces towards the valley and home.



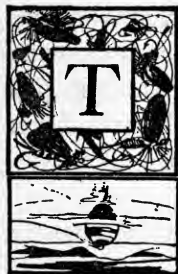
WHEN WATERS ARE LOW

“Then we’ll talk of our triumphs, and boast of our slaughter,

How we hooked him, and played him, and killed him so fine,

And the battle so gloriously finished in water,

Again and again we’ll drink over in wine!”



THAT dingy-looking figure with a pale face, who sits on his three-legged stool reading the news from the scrap of paper that contained his sandwiches or his “paste,” and who ever

and anon casts an expectant, almost hungry glance at the gaily coloured float as it bobs on the ripples of an artificial lake, is a fisherman keenly interested in his sport. But he shivers when the wintry wind sweeps with an aggressive freedom over the gray water, and the passers-by involuntarily turn their coat collars up and shiver too, as they throw

a look of compassion towards the ardent disciple of Izaak.

But the angler needs no pity. He experiences the same delightful sensations in the run of a roach as the fly-fisher does when being raced headlong down the banks of a rocky stream by a fighting salmon. Let the chilly wind blow across the water, or the rain pelt him with icy drops, our bottom-fisher is still happy. He was born an angler, and an angler he will die.

Yet, notwithstanding the fact that the same instincts run in the veins of all classes of fishermen, how different and unique are the circumstances under which the trout-fisher plies his art, more especially if the stream is a rapid, rocky one! As lightly equipped as possible, he sets off with his feather-weight rod and a fly-book and reel that easily go into the pocket. As there is much walking to do, waders and brogues are out of the

question, and the most important part of his clothing is his boots. These must be well studded with nails, to prevent slipping on the rugged rocks and polished stones of the river-bed, and if they are thick in the sole, so much the less foot-weary is the wearer likely to be. The companionable flask is carefully stowed away in one of the pockets of a well-worn tweed jacket, and, although the angler does not, as a rule, "make a gawd of his stomick," a place is found for the necessary lunch. If a basket is carried, it is of the smallest make, and even then it is often more of an encumbrance than a necessity, when fishing the rugged, overgrown streams of the mountain-sides. The trout are small in such places, and if a capacious pocket is filled on a hot June day, or even on a more favourable occasion, the most fastidious angler is satisfied.

All that is beautiful, all that is hopeful,

wait upon the trout-fisher. His season opens with the unfolding of leaves and lengthening of days, and he turns his back on winter and realises to the full the meaning of that gladsome word Spring. The trout is a prince among fishes. He will not deign to live in waters that are contaminated by the haunts of man. The streams that are born in the rocks of the hill-tops, which wander through moors of peat and heather, are his own, and in the smaller tributaries not even the sewin, much less the salmon, can usurp his birthright or disturb his peace.

Artist and poet never grow weary of expressing the trout-stream's most subtle charms, and with these the angler renews his acquaintance every year. Season follows season, yet it is the same old river, and he never sighs for change.

The very "uncertainty"—*glorious* it

has often been called—of his sport only lends it additional zest. A most promising day may prove a disappointment so far as actual fishing is concerned; but no angler was ever the worse off for having made an honest, if unsuccessful, attempt to induce the trout to take his flies or bait. “Atte the least,” says Dame Juliana de Berners, “he hath his holsom walke and mery at his ease, a sweet ayre of the sweete armony of fowles. And yf the angler take fysshe, surely thenne is there noo men merier than he is in his spyryte.”

A mention of the uncertainty of fishing which suggests the fastidiousness of trout, brings to remembrance one hot day in June when I thought that, owing to the coldness of the preceding month, good sport was probably to be had with the Stone-fly, or failing that, its larva, the Creeper. There was a warm wind from the south-west, and the earth seemed to

smile a welcome to the summer sun. Down by the stream the vegetation was luxuriant, and the rippling water danced in the sunshine, save where it made its sinuous way through smothering masses of forget-me-not, marsh ragwort, and rank grasses, or under the golden pennons of the water iris which fluttered idly over the bristling array of sword-like leaves. The heavy scent of meadow-sweet intermingled with that of gorse, and the hum of bees told where the wild thyme's lilac clusters grew.

Crossing by a stone bridge, I looked over the parapet into a deep pool which was bounded on the one side by a mill and its old mossy wheel, and on the other by shelving rocks clothed with magnificent ferns. The gorge was so deep that the sunlight only struck one corner of the pool, but it was sufficient to enable me to see a monster trout lazily basking in the warm rays. He was evidently the

patriarch of the pool, and would not only need some skill in coaxing, but the battle would only be half won supposing I should succeed in hooking him. I had decided to go lower down and work upstream, but the prospect of some sport with a lusty pounder soon caused me to alter my plans.

Rounding the mill, so as to approach the pool unseen from below, I had to pass within touching distance of the mill wheel. More than once, when a boy, had the miller douched me with a somewhat violent shower-bath when passing that point, so that I ever kept an eye on the wheel lest the trick should be repeated. The reason for such behaviour on the part of my floury enemy was that he nursed a fond delusion that the fish in the pool were his particular property; and as he had ample facilities for getting the best of them by means that were anything but fair, he naturally looked

upon any other fisherman as an intruder. He was leaning over a low wall overlooking the water on this occasion. Having also seen the fish, he no doubt guessed what my purpose was.

Unfortunately, the only possible point from which I could attack my prey was within reach of the water, should the miller choose to switch it on. But he appeared to be satisfied in his own mind that the fish was not only his, but that his it would remain. It was beyond his belief that anyone could take an old stager in the broad June sunlight, with the water low and as clear as gin.

Well hidden behind a boulder, I kept an eye on my prize as I got things in readiness. Only once had he risen, and that was to a struggling Coch y bondu which he could not resist. He rose to it gently, merely sucked it under, as it were, with his lips, and returned to his lair. That, I thought, was surely a pro-

vidential hint; but no matter how skillfully I dabbled my Coch y bondu over him, he would not budge. A March Brown, Blue Dun, Alder, and Sky Blue were all put through a thorough test, but they failed to tempt him.

The floury face was still above the wall, and I thought that it smiled as I looked up.

Not to be beaten so easily, I put on a Stone-fly. The gentle breeze carried it along until it alighted about a foot above the fish. As it floated down the surface he flicked his tail and shot some distance down-stream, but turned again as if to have a good look at the approaching fly. Slowly he swam towards it; my hand tightened involuntarily, and with bated breath I waited. Straight for the fly he swam; but no, without ever attempting to touch it, he metaphorically shrugged his shoulders and went leisurely back to his former position.

Then I thought the miller uttered a scornful laugh.

Again and again I tried the Stone-fly, both on the surface and below. Now I put on a Creeper and drew the repulsive little creature along the edge of the broken water, wriggled it to within a few inches of the trout's nose, with no better result. He was immovable and hard to please, and I was exhausting my means of attack as well as my stock of patience.

The miller had now left the wall, and I feared that he had gone in to turn his gear on; but I was mistaken—there was the ghostly face, now wearing an unmistakable smile, peering from a cobwebbed window above.

I was so well hidden that I lit a pipe, as most anglers do when in a contemplative mood, and watched the stubborn old veteran in the water. Perhaps he would commence feeding when the sun-

light left the pool. He was certainly over a pound in weight, and a beautiful specimen of his race. Through the clear water his crimson, pulsating gills were distinctly visible, and the carmine spots stood out like rows of jewels on his golden sides. The colours darkened and brightened again as the cloud shadows passed over him, and the floating bubbles glinted on the pebbly bottom like a succession of silvery rings. Once he darted like a flash into the dark green water under the fern-clad bank, but it was only a swallow that had dipped into the pool and startled him. How was I to land such a prize, and pay off old scores against my ancient friend in the window by doing so? Mechanically looking through my fly-book, I came upon some Stewart tackle, and decided forthwith to tempt the trout with a worm. Selecting the liveliest brandling I had, and swinging it gently up-stream, it rested on a

dry shelving rock some distance beyond the fish. After slowly drawing it into the water I let it drift in the direction of my quarry. No sooner had he seen it than he made a vigorous dash towards it, and in an instant was hooked and fighting for liberty. The reel buzzed and the lissom rod bent as he rushed towards the head of the pool. He leaped out of the water, darted from bank to bank, plunged into the depths, and once wriggled into the shallows. Like a terrier worrying a rat, he savagely shook the tackle, making rod and line shiver, then, after a moment's pause, made a desperate effort to run down-stream. That I had to prevent at all costs, for there would be no possibility of following him, and the tackle would assuredly break in the rapids below, and I had no landing-net. My only chance was to cross over and stand in the shallowest part, where there would be more room for action, and

where I could perhaps grab the trout as soon as he showed signs of exhaustion. But no sooner had I changed my position, and was standing knee-deep on the opposite side, than the great wheel began to groan and creak, and a huge volume of water shot over it, falling on the very spot that I had just vacated.

For a moment I caught a glimpse of my old enemy, and thanked heaven that his face now wore a disappointed scowl.

The little nine-foot rod was tried to its utmost, as I headed the fish back to the pool, but it did its work well. Half exhausted, my captive now glided this way and that in the deep water. He had lost the pluck and energy of the first stages of the fight, but was still strong and enduring. The whirring of the reel, however, soon came in fitful snatches, as if in unison with the failing gasps of the dying fish. Slowly he rose to the surface, dipped again in one last effort

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for life, and then floated towards me, the wondrous colours of his sides glistening in the sun.

“Hark! to the music of the reel;

’Tis welcome, it is glorious:

It wanders through the winding wheel,

Returning and victorious.”

He was indeed a “lusty trout,” and that he had made so brave a fight for life, and had at last been caught by fair means rather than by foul, made the heart of the angler glad.



THE HAUNTED TARN

A NIGHT-FISHING EPISODE

“Though sluggards deem it but an idle chase,
And marvel men should quit their easy chair
The toilsome way and long, long league to trace,
Oh! there is sweetness in the mountain air,
And life that bloated ease can never hope to share.”



NIGHT-FISHING is perhaps the most disappointing, or, at any rate, the least pleasant, form of angling, and, unless one lives close by the water and can turn out for an hour or two when he knows “the rise” is on, with a comforting feeling that a cosy smoke-room is close at hand to take refuge in should the trout prove stubborn, it is seldom indulged in. I refer mainly to lake-fishing, for the ordinary trout-stream, however good it may be by day, is usually best left alone in the hours of darkness, when one cannot see either where to

place the fly or to avoid branches, weed, or other obstacles which are ever ready to arrest the cast.

Given, however, a moonlight night, or one that is starlight, more particularly after a hot day, excellent sport can be had, even without the aid of a boat, on almost any mountain lake or tarn, if one has the patience to wait for the trout to rise, and the endurance to stand the chilling air at an hour when man—by nature, but not always by custom, a diurnal animal—should be warm and asleep.

Apart from the sport, the experience of a night's fishing on the moors has a fascination for many. To a few it affords a feeling something akin to that uncurbed, wild delight which must run in the veins of the mountain fox when he is in the still, dark night following the burning scent of the hare which he cannot see. Do not some of us still retain

a remnant of that savage instinct which prompted primitive man to hunt his prey before waiting until he was hungry? Even the philosophic Thoreau in the Walden woods sometimes felt that he could fall upon the woodchuck and devour its raw, warm flesh; yet he was anything but a hunter.

One midnight expedition, though not abounding in startling incident or thrilling adventure, in the chase of *Salmo fario*, I can well remember.

It was at least eight miles to the mountain lake that I had decided to fish, and a great part of the way was hard climbing. And although the path was tolerably familiar by day, to attempt it at night was altogether another matter. So, after much difficulty, I persuaded a native of the village to accompany me as guide. All Welshmen of a certain class are superstitious, and my "gillie" was no exception. He had "heard tell"

of the raven that haunted the black shades of the precipices that bound the lake which we were to visit, and he was afraid lest he should see the dread bird of ill-omen. Other fearsome things, which only the Welsh language can describe, he nursed in his imagination as holding court on the lonely shores of the lake. He was short, humpbacked, and ferret-faced, yet as tough a specimen as one would wish to see. From much mole-catching and ferreting in muddy weather, his clothes had become begrimed with red-brown soil, and the tweed jacket, which had evidently seen its best days on someone else's back, hung in loose folds from the narrow shoulders of its wearer.

As we climbed the winding path up the hillside, the summer night was already beginning to get chilly. Here and there, where a rock or stone wall had absorbed the heat of the sun, one ex-

perienced a puff of warm air in passing ; but the cold, grey dew was falling on moor and meadow before the last traces of day had vanished from the western sky.

When the summit of the first hill had been reached, the way lay across grassy sheepwalks interspersed with bog and rocky ground. Here my ferret-faced companion took the lead. He shuffled along—his trousers were always too long for him—with a quick, uneasy step, following the path, which was scarcely discernible in the darkness, as if by scent. Instinctively he avoided bumping against projecting stones, and by the sound of his footsteps he could say when he was nearing dangerous ground. He threaded his way across the wide moor in silence. The only occasion upon which he looked aside and appeared to forget the dread black lake, with its awful precipitous sides and their uncanny

inhabitants, was when the shadowy forms of mountain ponies appeared and vanished again in the darkness, or when the patter of scuttling sheep could be heard on the soft turf. Now and then a snipe would rise from among the rushes, and passing curlew whistle mournfully in the distance. The slight breeze carried on fitful puffs the sound of the little stream far below as it rippled round its stony bends, and that sleepless bird the plover was just as persistently uttering its "Pee-weet, weet-a-weet-a" as it does by day.

Before the lake is reached a broad rising plain of heather has to be crossed, and there the walking is exceedingly difficult. The rising moon cast a pale light above the horizon which served to make visible the treacherous bogs, with their covering of yellow-green moss and butterworts, but the moor was intersected with other pitfalls. The path had

entirely melted away into the heather, and the latter was honeycombed with deep holes half-filled with slimy water, while here and there the gurgle of a tiny brook could be heard deep down in the peat. In some places these brooklets are entirely concealed by thin turf, but the narrow channel through which the water flows is often three or four feet deep, and an unwary step might easily be followed by a broken leg.

The lake breaks suddenly into view when the last ridge is topped, and its dark waters involuntarily repel one at first sight. It is only accessible from one side, all others being walled in by rugged crags that rise three hundred feet above the inky water. There the snow often lies in the deep hollows until June, and scarcely a thing but the raven and the parsley fern can find in those bare rocks a home.

Usually so dark and forbidding even

by day, the lake on that particular night was bespangled with glittering stars that were mirrored on its placid surface. The desolation and loneliness that ever seem to haunt that quiet stretch of water and those majestic old rocks oppress the mind, and one involuntarily listens and longs for a sound. But only the low swish of a tiny waterfall on the other side falls upon the ear, and it rises and sinks like the sighing of some troubled spirit as the night air drifts this way or that.

Not a fish was moving when we arrived, not a ripple broke the glassy water, and the white stars of those unfathomable depths were as still as they were in the blue-black sky. After a little while, however, there was a flop in the distance, then another, and in a few seconds some little waves came rolling towards the shore. The stars danced over them, and the water lapped against the stones or sucked into the creeks of

crumbly peat. The trout had begun to rise, and in a little while the whole surface of the lake was dimpled with hundreds of leaping fish. They seemed to be sporting like a school of porpoises, and when they did flick a tail at my carefully prepared cast, the result was either a foul-hooked fish—or not so much as that. Still I whipped away diligently with the two-handed rod, letting out more and more line, and manipulating the flies in every conceivable way, until weariness and tantalisation combined prompted me to reel up and wonder what that sly Welshman was doing.

I came upon him casting vigorously with his ash-plant rod, and, sure enough, there on the bank lay a little heap of fish glistening in the moonlight. There were comparatively few trout rising here, yet he was enjoying good sport.

Having found the fly useless, he had taken to worm ; but instead of using it

in the usual way, he was skimming it along the surface of the water, and in the dim light looked just as if he might be spinning a minnow. He made few "casts" without getting a rise, and, as his tackle was strong, the fish, when once firmly hooked, were unceremoniously hauled to land. His long experience of lake-fishing had taught him that it was useless to angle in the orthodox manner when the fish were rising in the vigorous, playful mood that I have mentioned, and subsequent trials have proved the truth of the statement.

Whether the trout are merely playing or feeding on midges I could never ascertain, and it does not much matter from a fisherman's point of view. In the former case the fish are scarcely worth trying for; and, again, if they are determined to make their suppers off midges they are equally hard to catch, for the very good reason that

an artificial midge has never yet been made with any resemblance to the real thing.

However, I soon followed the example of my earthy-coloured friend, and had an hour's good sport before the fish ceased feeding. It was significant that the other fish who were holding high carnival on the surface of the deeper water discontinued their extraordinary capers almost at the same time, and the memory of that final scene is as clear to-day as if it happened but last night, although so many summers ago.

Day was just appearing in a blue-gray light, and it served to illuminate a little white cloud that hung like a fleece against the dark shade of the highest precipice. The cloud, almost imperceptibly sinking, increased in size as it neared the black water, and its lower parts ran out into a long line of white mist. Like a horizon of light lying over

a dark sea, it gave one the impression of an enormity of distance, an immensity of space, too great for the mind to conceive. One felt that he was looking through that vast mountain range towering above, and across an illimitable sea beyond. Then a cold fleecy vapour swept past, mountain and lake were blotted out, and the trout were immediately silent.

It was then only that I instinctively felt a kind of sympathy for my superstitious companion, who was hurriedly, and with nervous hands, disjoining his rod, while he ever and anon turned a worried, scared face towards the home of the raven. He knew full well that, with the first glint of dawn, the dread bird would glide out of its rocky haunt like a messenger of evil with fell intent.

We were far away from home, high up in cold cloudland. It was wet and

desolate. A chilly, cell-like dankness pervaded that mighty hollow in the hills, around which the vapour now swept in unending ghost-like columns. Then the deathly silence was at last made hideous by the raven's cry; a quick succession of half-stifled, gulping croaks pierced the veil of vapour and were echoed and re-echoed from rock to rock. In derisive chuckles and fiendish grunts the evil spirit of the mountains announced the day, and verily it was a shuddering, hellish sound befitting such an eerie place.

On turning round I discovered that my "gillie" had already fled, and I did not overtake him until well on the way home. There he was, sitting against a wall, nursing his bony knees, shivering with the cold, and doing his best to absorb some of the warmth of the pale sunlight. An empty beer-bottle, which had contained his whisky, lay by his side,

and through his chattering teeth he explained how he had lost some of his fish in his headlong race across the moor to escape the curse of the raven. Then, with an imploring look at me, he endeavoured to suck another drop out of the bottle long empty, and threw it away with a sigh. But he brightened and exclaimed, "Arglwydd Mawr!" ("Great Lord!") as he swallowed some of the contents of my flask, and in rather less than an hour we were heartily tackling a breakfast in the village inn. The fresh trout, firm and pinky, eggs and bacon, and the appetite that only a night's angling on the cold hills can provide, are not soon forgotten in after years. And I am old-fashioned enough to still love the real old "village pub." for its own sake, notwithstanding the musty atmosphere of the "parlour," the awful whisky, and the casual management. While there is yet one re-

maining, let me enjoy its warm welcome and peaceful seclusion rather than endure the all too attentive waiters and other "comforts" of the first-class angling hotel.





THE SEASON OF MISTS

*The moors are still. The sun with rust
Has stained the bog-land asphodel ;
From valley deep to upland fell
The night is creeping.*

*Red rushes fade. The hills rise gray
Above the violet mist. Dark streams,
'Mid Autumn's dying breath, in dreams
Are singing, sleeping.*

A. T. J.,
Eventide.







WHEN THE SEWIN COME UP FROM THE SEA

“Now Iris bends her bow across the hills,
And looks with pity on the low-sunk rills ;
Betimes she weeps, then smiles, then weeps again,
Until her intermitting tears o’erflow the plain,
And sudden rushing down the ravine’s bed,
Swell stream and river to the sedge’s head.”



ALTHOUGH, with the coming of September, the trout season is drawing to a close, there are many anglers who will record its latest days among the best of the year. Apart from the fact that the

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streams are usually in better condition this month than they have been throughout the summer, there are many other reasons why September fishing is held in such high esteem. The fish are not satiated with natural food ; they seem to have thrown off the lassitude of mid-summer, and feed now as hungrily as they did during the first rise of the March Brown. The angler who, in the sultry days of July, cast his flies among the innumerable host of insects that danced over the water, and who could not but exclaim of his own feeble imitations, "What are they among so many?" was playing against heavy odds. Now all that is changed. The trout finds that, day by day, food is diminishing, and his appetite sharpens accordingly. There is a freshness in the air which makes the work of the angler easier, and those persisting flies, that persecuted his perspiring face as he waded through the tall

bracken of earlier days, have become drowsy and are basking away their little lives on the sun-warmed rocks.

Then who does not love

“September’s yellow ;
Morns of dew-strung gossamer,
Thoughtful days without a stir” ;

the bright tints of crimson and gold that have at last come to relieve the heavy greenery of the summer woods ; the autumnal blooming of the honeysuckle and the scarlet berries of its June blossoms ; and the wild roses that have reappeared as if to have one last look at the sun ?

In the fields, where the steel-blue turnip leaves hide the stealthy partridge as she creeps and calls her broken covey, golden marigolds, cornflowers, and pimpernels are making a show of colour that the month of roses might have been proud of. The cuckoo has left the woods and moorlands, but the incessant

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chatter of the whitethroat still enlivens the willows by the waterside. Blackbirds and thrushes, having finished their annual business of nest-making and moulting, sing again as they did in the lengthening days of spring; but they are not love-making now. Their songs are the expressions of the unrestrained joyousness of living, the gushing music of happiness unfettered and unalloyed.

There is a sweetness in these autumnal days, with their jewelled threads of gossamer, their cool, dewy mornings, blue distances, and lingering sunsets, that those of no other season can give us.

But let me relate the incidents of a late September day, which will, perchance, serve to show those as yet unacquainted with the trout-stream that it affords other game than that which gives it its name.

It had been raining almost incessantly for some days, and the moist west wind

had sounded the first whisper of autumn in the dripping trees. Before dawn, however, rain and wind ceased, a chilly stillness settled over field and woodland, and when the sun rose, every twig, and branch, and grass-blade sparkled with crystals of hoar-frost.

The stream was rushing and tumbling in a brown flood over its rocky bed, carrying with it sheaves of corn, clusters of rushes, brown and green, branches, and dead driftwood, as it hurried on its way to the sea. The leaves of sycamore and hazel fell upon its murky tide, and were quickly hustled out of sight, or they collected upon the slower backwaters, covering the foamy surface with a carpet of yellow and russet brown.

It was the first flood of the month ; and just as the first frost of winter marks the coming of the fieldfare from the North, so the brown waters of Septem-

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ber bring the sewin up from the sea. Now, whether the game and silvery sewin of Wales, the hirling of Scotland, the peal of England, and white trout of Ireland are one and the same, or whether the first is a distinct species, I do not propose to discuss. It is enough for me to know that for nearly thirty summers I have looked forward to their coming, and come they always have with this first autumnal flood. Every year have I gone to the waterside to welcome their return to the same stream, and here they are to-day, just as long ago, fighting their way up the surging torrent, leaping the little cascades, streaking the shallow places with their dorsal fins, pushing ahead in one frenzied desire to go—whither?

In the deep waters they do not show themselves, but they are there, each impelled by that wonderful instinct, forging ahead with one object, one de-

sire. Just as, during the rain and wind of the preceding night, whole armies of little birds were heading the storms as they fought their way across the dark and dreary seas to some sunnier land, so, unseen, the dauntless little sewin are struggling with the fierce and murky water, and now and then a monster salmon, burning with the same irresistible impulse, joins the swimming crowd. Whence they come, or whither they go, seem at the time matters of no moment. There is the common instinct—the all-powerful instinct, urging each one forward, and go they must. On, on, on, fighting the foaming flood, far up the roaring river.

The rush will not last long, and every village rustic who can handle a rod is at the waterside hauling out the silvery fish. There is scarcely any skill required in fishing thus with a worm. The sewin are hungry, and take the bait readily,

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and with strong tackle they are simply hurled out of the dark-coloured water by these unscientific sportsmen. It is a matter of filling a basket, and that only, with these anglers, and they go about it in the most effectual way. Their spell of happiness is, however, soon over, for when the stream runs down, as it does quickly, and the water is a pale golden brown in the sunlight, the fish cease taking worm, and that is the signal for the fly-fisher to have his innings.

Sewin have a weakness for silver, and whatever the fly may be, a silver body will attract the fish if anything will. A favourite pattern in many parts of Wales is made up of brown mallard wing, blue or green hackle, silver body, mounted on a No. 9 Limerick hook. If the fish are running less than a pound the hook and fly must be smaller, and then some common trout may also be added to the creel. One works for sewin just as if he

were fishing for their non-migratory relations ; and as some of the old stagers have a fighting power that would do credit to many a grilse, the tackle must be good and the rod fairly stiff, yet as light as possible. If the stream is not too rocky, a silver minnow will prove an equally attractive bait.

As one follows the river from its lower levels, every open space—for it is much overgrown with hazels and willows—affords a possibility of a struggle with a lusty sewin, and the circumstances are such that the chances are ever in favour of the fish, for he will dart among the floating drift and scum that swirls in the eddying corners, hitch your line in the trailers of a bramble, or rasp it against the sharp edge of a slaty rock, until one verily shivers for the safety of his cast and its victim. Let him rush downstream, whence, owing to rock and bush, you cannot follow him, and he will

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assuredly break away in the heavy strain of the current and go off rejoicing, or, as Professor Wilson says, "with a fly in one cheek and his tongue in the other." It is just these difficulties that one has to encounter, the "creeping and crawling" over slippery stones, under branch and thorny briar, with the knowledge that even when firmly hooked the sewin will tax your skill to the uttermost, and probably break away just when you think you've got him, which give that great fascination to a sport that can only be realised by those who have experienced it.

Half-way up the hillside the water off the moorlands beyond falls over a perpendicular wall of rock into a ravine below, and it is here that the upward rush of the sewin is abruptly brought to a close. The brave little fellows are assembled in the foaming trough of the fall. Watch that heavy flood for a mom-

ent, as it pours itself with tremendous force from the heights above, and now and then a silvery streak shoots upwards, only to be beaten down again into the seething pool. Silvery flashes in the sunlight, the fish follow one another in quick succession, leaping against an impossible barrier, charging the force of the flood that ever hurls them back, returning again and again with renewed vigour, burning with that mad desire to go they know not where. Now a big fellow has reached a ledge of black, slimy rock. By some extraordinary means he "holds on" for an instant, but a volume of water knocks him down, and his white under parts gleam in the sun as he falls. Still, he tries again; the impulse within him is strong, but the force of the fall is stronger.

For how many centuries have past races of sewin worked their way up the surging miles of this rocky river until

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brought to their journey's end at the waterfall? Like the swallows that return to last year's nests, so the sewin annually come back to the same old stream, the stream which was their birth-place and their nursery. But, unlike the former, who love the ancient rafters of the "straw-built shed," and desire no other or better place, these migratory fishes struggle on year after year, in a frenzy of excitement to go beyond the barrier of rock and tumbling water to a further home that they know not of.



THE SPIRIT OF SEPTEMBER

“What’s i’ the air?

Some subtle spirit runs through all my veins,
Hope seems to ride this morning on the wind,
And Joy outshines the Sun.”



WHEN the finches are
gleaning the corn from
the last of the straws
which the briars raked
from the loaded carts as
they passed down the
narrow lanes, when even
the swallows seem to

float on tired wings, and the yellow-hammers scarcely have the energy to sing, the summer awakes from her slumbers. Then the blue shades of the far valleys pale into lavender, the lavender into a cold gray, and the mist comes down the hillsides. A west wind hurries it over the mountain-top and moor, now tearing it into shreds, disclosing, for brief moments, fleeting visions of emerald grass, of sunlit heather, of flaming gorse ; now

piling it up billow upon billow, only to be swirled away in filmy tails of white. It combs out the crimped tresses of the summer cloud and makes smooth, straight rivers of silver in the azure. But it is not until the wind has become less boisterous, not until the mist has trailed the fringe of its tattered skirts across the cultivated lands of the lower hills, that the grateful rain, gentle as dew, comes to water the sunburnt earth.

It is these first showers of autumn which give such a charm to the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." To wake up after a soaking night and smell the autumn in the air, is one of the most invigorating sensations of the year. To see the sun blinking through the white mists which are lying tree-deep in the valleys, to watch the deep blue come to the far distances, to wait until the steamy vapour rises up from the near fields, to stay a little while until the crystal dew is

flashing in prismatic tints from a thousand strands of gossamer unseen before, until the lower branches of the elms are afire with gold, and the wet brambles are smouldering in a burning rust, is to drink deep of the wine of the country, the good wine that has been kept until the end.

In September early summer returns again. The earth is born anew. Fresh flowers spring upon the graves of those which are dead. The old turf, cracked and scarred, hard as the very roads, becomes friable and moist. A young green comes to the scorched meadows, wild roses and honeysuckle to the hedgerows.

A cooler earth and a brisker air inspire a desire for action, exercise. Man shares with nature the common revival. The angler who has tapped the barometer for six melancholy weeks of drought and dwindling streams, takes down his rod again and finds the trout imbued with new life. They are scarcely so robust,

and more inclined to avoid the rougher waters, as in the spring days, yet game as always and well-conditioned. And what of the enchantment of the high moors, whither the fisherman will go if he be wise, of the purple plains of heather, of the streams running free, and once more clean, to the valley which sleeps dreamily in haze, of the films of blue rain that come as quickly as they go, of the wisps of sunlit cloud like white, downy feathers sailing slowly across the deep violet that curtains the precipices of the silent hills? It is not only the sport which is good, not only the things seen, but the unuttered poetry which dwells there.

By no means the least pleasing feature in the September landscape is the flashing of gun-barrels in the sunlight, and the sportsman who loves the "little brown bird" of this month as much as he does the rod and the river should be

happy now indeed. And to those of us who still know what it is to feel the crisp, dew-beaded turnip leaves against one's legs, to those who have not forgotten those inborn instincts of the chase, the cold touch of a gun-barrel, the happy spaniels with the sheen on their dew-drenched flanks as they emerge from the clover, together with the thrill which hard exercise affords, are as fitting parts of the "season of mists" as that bracken which, having relaxed the support which it had among the hazel branches, has fallen, a splash of yellow, across the path.

The spirit of sport rises again in these days as sap rises after rain. The air is charged with vitality and the days seem young again. To wade knee-deep through tall, strong rushes growing in an oozy bed, and sometimes deeper still in the mossy bogs that hide between the hummocks of heather, in the chase of the

untamed grouse, which would be distressing at other times, is now a positive delight. One feels conscious of a persistent inclination to let the well-tried setter, who also is emancipated at last from the monotony of the off-season, have her uncurbed liberty. Some of the joy of her life becomes our own when we see how gladly she ranges the wide moor, how suddenly she checks her wild career to creep on cat-like feet, her velvet lips quivering as she feels the air, as near as she dare to where the birds are crouching, to wait, immovable as one of the gray boulders themselves, listening with intense anxiety for approaching footsteps, for the first syllable of a voice she knows so well. Again, is there not a keener desire to prolong the fight with the lusty salmon in the days when the rowan berries are scarlet on the hills? Is there not a feeling akin to disappointment when the plucky little trout all too

soon turns his golden sides to the sun. Rather than the slow, almost pathetic music of the reel which accompanies the return of the victorious line to its place, we would have another run, another fight with our captive, amid the "bunkers" which the rocky stream affords.

After long months of lethargy, the sporting instincts are now revived with a strange new vigour. The hunted shares with the hunter that tonic which stirs the blood—that enthusiasm which comes with September. A companionship that is more real, a sympathy that is more subtle, suddenly grow again between us and our dogs. We renew old friendships with rods and guns, and we lovethered fox and the clean-run salmon with an increasing love as the woods are yellowing towards October.

And nature is never so kindly, never more lavish in her generosity, than she is when the year is approaching its end.

Rough winds may "shake the darling buds of May," an insufferable sun may wither the flowers and scorch the grass of June, but to-day the country enjoys the deep contentment which only Autumn knows. The low sun will shine golden through the drooping tresses of the birch long after the first frost has laid its gentle touch upon the leaves, the "maple burn itself away" before an inclement wind comes to sweep its branches clean. The hazel-nuts will have grown hard and loose in their leafy jackets, rooks will have come to the oak-wood for the annual festival of acorns, the lordly pheasant will have wandered far from home to lend his splendour to the outlying spinneys, the last of the summer birds will have gone, before we need begin to think of "ruin'd choirs" and the cold gray of winter. And Nature will have been kind and companionable all the time.

THE AULD GRAY BRIG

“Whoe’er has travell’d life’s dull round,
Where’er his stages may have been,
May sigh to think he still has found
The warmest welcome at an inn.”



LONELY moorland road winds across the silent hills. Its grassy pavements know not the sensations of traffic, save when flocks of sheep are being driven to and from the upland

walks, or when, in late summer, loads of hay and fragrant rushes upon rough wooden sleighs—vehicular traffic being impossible on such a track—are being dragged to the farmyards lower down the hillsides. Stony paths, washed and bleached by rain and sun, intersect the closely nibbled turf, and the stonechat and mountain blackbird make their homes in the holes which gape in the tottering, unplastered walls. Of wild flowers there are plenty, but choicest of

them all—the incomparable heather only excepted—is the wild thyme which crowns each lichened boulder that lies half buried in the mountain turf. Here it cushions the dry, sandy ant-heaps with its lilac clusters, there it shares with yarrow the fringe of the barren track, its elegant blossoms set in a dainty spreading fabric of bay-green leaves. And from the days when the sand-martins return to their burrows in the earthy sides of the crumbling scaurs, until the bog asphodel fires the September marsh, the wild thyme with its aromatic fragrance ever accompanies that succession of beautiful flowers which marks the progress of the moorland summer.

About midway between the spot where the road emerges from the wooded hillside of the sultry valley, up which it has wandered like a weary traveller, and the far-distant moor, where it terminates in a number of sheep tracks, that

are scribbled in sinuous ways of emerald between the darker hummocks of heather, it dips into a deep gorge that is filled with the merry music of rushing water.

An old gray bridge spans the stream, and it has been so adorned by time, attuned into harmony with its surroundings, that it might have existed there since the age began. It is easier to think of it rising out of the primeval snow and ice, like the great water-worn boulders themselves, hoary with the sinking, shredded mantle of that long and silent winter, than to imagine that it grew to the sound of the hammer and chisel. No ivy clings to the bare walls, scarcely a fern relieves their dour, cold grayness with a touch of green. Only glaucous lichens, shrivelled relics of some half-forgotten age, creep their tedious way upon the stones. More venerable, it seems, than yonder ancient cromlech that stands, isolated and bare, on the

barren moor—a milestone dropped by Time upon the road of history.

When the bracken is uncurling in the valley, and the daisies are sheeting the highland pastures, an angler will often approach from below. Standing on the bridge, one may see his cast flashing like gossamer above the scrubby willows that grow among the stones in mid-water. He stalks his cunning prey warily, working up-stream. The huge rocks, tumbled in utterest confusion by the torrents of many winters, afford safe hiding places for the trout, and the angler can creep unseen between their ponderous sides.

At the bridge he ceases fishing, and presently in the grateful shade

“ lies stretched out,
And eased of basket and of rod
Counts his day’s spoil, the spotted trout.”

Ask him why he chooses that spot, ask a dozen different anglers who fish that

stream in the course of a season why they invariably halt on that green sward, where the wild thyme's clusters are the finest and the sweetest, and a ready explanation they will not be able to offer. To all of them the "Auld Gray Brig" (for so it is called by those who know it) is the hostel of the waterside. In driving rain or scorching sun it has extended a kindly welcome to generations of fishermen, and in its grateful shade many a good day's sport has been recalled, many a day of ill-luck compensated by some memories that the place brings to mind.

One might imagine that all the personalities who have long ago passed away from the moorland stream for ever return in spirit to the old haunts, and here, by the bridge, forgather and invite the passer-by to join their club of conviviality. For mark the angler who approaches the "Auld Gray Brig" for the first time. He does not inquiringly scan

the weathered features, expectant to find some tablet to the memory of its builder, some quaint design in architecture, but he enters at once into the spirit of the place, as one might enter some village inn that was familiar. The basket is slung off, the rod rests upon the wall, and, putting himself at his ease, he seems to say :

“ I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell ;
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet, keen smell.”

And it is enough. The “when” or “how” trouble him not. The lunch is eaten, the pipe smoked, and the angler is loth to leave the genial atmosphere of companionship which ever pervades the place.

In the peaceful seclusion of the “Auld Gray Brig” memories of old Izaak Walton’s gentle manner and pleasing talk irresistibly thrust themselves upon the “contemplative” angler’s thoughts.

We can hear the kindly voice : “ No

life, my honest scholar, no life so happy and so pleasant, as the life of a well-governed angler, for when the lawyer is swallowed up with business and the statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip banks, hear the birds sing and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silent silver streams which we now see glide so quietly by us. Indeed, my good scholar, we may say of angling as Dr Boteler said of strawberries, 'Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did'; and so, if I might be judge, 'God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation than angling.'"

Or a Green Drake flutters by in the afternoon sun, and the spirit of good Charles Kingsley is with us to invigorate and refresh. We see the wiry figure—parson, philosopher, naturalist, angler, and poet—with the enthusiasm of a school-boy, realising to the full the ex-

hilarating joys of the fishing holiday to which the following invitation to his friend Tom Hughes was a prelude :

“ Come away with me, Tom,
Term and talk is done ;
My poor lads are reaping,
Busy everyone.
Curates mind the parish,
Sweepers mind the court,
We’ll away to Snowdon
For our ten days’ sport.
Fish the August evening—
Till the eve is passed,
Whoop like boys at pounders,
Fairly played and grassed.
When they cease to dimple,
Lunge, and swerve and leap,
Then up our Siabod,
Choose our nest and sleep.
Up a thousand feet, Tom,
Round the Lion’s head,
Find soft stones to leeward
And make up our bed.
Eat our bread and bacon,
Smoke the pipe of peace,
And, ere we be drowsy,
Give our boots a grease.

Homer's heroes did so,
 Why not such as we?
 What are sheets and servants?
 Superfluity!"

Or perhaps some favourite pages of that unsurpassed prose idyll and fisherman's entomology—*Chalk Stream Studies*—come back to mind in which the fearless spirit of the man, his keenness of perception, vigour, and beauty of expression, are written in every line, whether he is unfolding the manifold mysteries of the aquatic grasses, discussing a philosophic problem, or indulging in an eulogy upon his favourite Green Drakes and Yellow Sallies.

Again, and we may think of him in the saddle—under the "warm, dark roof" of the fir-woods, the wintry wind making music above his head. Even then he cannot but give the streams he loved a thought—"the rich river-banks, the only part of the landscape where the hand

of man has never interfered, and the only part in general which never feels the drought of summer—"the trees planted by the waterside, whose leaf shall not wither.'"

But the "Auld Gray Brig" has an open door, a friendly hand outstretched, for others than those who go a-fishing. Town-tired men who seek a panacea for the worries and stress of life in the quietude of the hills, and those who go to explore the mysteries and treasures of moorland life and "quarried stone," lean upon those old walls, or indulge in the hospitable shade which pier and arch afford. Upon those broad parapets are graven deep the legends of old, "sermons in stones" which tell of the history of the earth, of the cave man who grappled with the wild horse, of the mammoth, of the days when the glacier quaked and groaned in the valley, and the sound of gushing water awoke the slumberous

hush of that still world of snow. Even the old shepherd, who has passed that way more often than he can ever remember, allows his flock to graze at will, and looks over upon

“ . . . the flood below,
Whose ripples, through the weeds of oily
green,
Like happy travellers chatter as they go.”

When evening comes, more than at any other time does the “Auld Gray Brig” give up her secrets. Like the flickering of the flames in some cosy ingle-nook the fires of the crimson west that are mirrored in the current send little shafts of light into the gathering shades. Well-remembered faces come out of the far darkness, voices out of the empty silence. Vacant places are filled again, and the good old times which seem “so much older than any history” return again with a weird familiarity.

And every year, when the wild thyme

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announces the coming of the upland summer, the old bridge makes new friends, for on those wild moors whose limits are the sky it is the one object which links that unbounded space with humanity. It is the trysting-place of the hills, where man may meet that subtle sympathy which exists between men and bridges the world over. All the roads and tracks of the moor lead to the old bridge; all the rivers of a hundred hills must join hands ere they pass in an unbroken flood beneath it.

And to those of us who know its charm, to all who love the old, the rivers and the broad moors, the "Auld Gray Brig" is an abode of peace where time passes smoothly, where the shadow of the years is as the grateful shade of summer trees.



THE FLOWER OF THE FISHES

A REMINISCENCE



HE gales which one is accustomed to expect at the season of the autumnal equinox had long delayed their coming. Day after day the sun, rising, looked upon a silent world of silver dews and deep blue mists. Every evening the bracken, long dead, on the eastern hills burned warm and ruddy in the wondrous glow of his setting. The rooks finished the acorns. Squirrels rummaged among the dead black leaves of the hedge bottoms, lest any fallen walnuts should have escaped their quick eyes. The hum of bees ceased when the ivy shed the last of its blossom, but still the yellow-hammers sang on, dozing, dreaming in the sun. And November was far spent before the rattle of falling

beech-leaves was heard in the still night. Then other sounds, faint and far-off in the high trees, foretold the coming of a change. But the autumn clung endearingly to her old traditions, and reluctantly surrendered her peace.

The wind that had for so long held back ultimately broke loose with such fury that it seemed as if it had gathered strength and courage while it waited and longed for liberty as the reposeful autumn days went dreamily by. It brought the rain, which beat upon the leaf-strewn earth with a heavy, thrashing sound—a wild, disquieting accompaniment to every lull in the loud tumult of the storm. Branches crashed in the darkness. Lightning fluttered intermittently far away, illuminating in the sheltered places the surf of the driven rain with its thin blue light.

Next day morning came late, and the muddied brooks were running banks

high. Still the wind raged and the leaden clouds were hanging low upon the earth. And it was not until evening that the wind, veering towards the north, sank into quietness. But far into the night the troubled forests groaned, and against the white stars the lissom lines of the beeches stood like tremulous harp-strings, thrilled and vibrating still with the throbbing pulse of that wondrous music. Very slowly the humming chords were stilled, and, in the intensity of the after-hush, sodden leaves were crisping with the frost ; and, later, velvet-footed rabbits were scuttling down the woodland track, hurrying to feed.

If the autumn had lingered far beyond its appointed time, its end had come abruptly, if not almost dramatically. And considering that it was the capture of the grayling which had led the angler into the land of streams, the conditions were not altogether unfavourable. True,

there are many grayling fishers who would not for choice go out when land and water are held in an icy grip, but a frosty day preceded by rainy weather is not without its good points. Indeed, provided the angler is not so unfortunate as to find his capricious prey in one of those sulky moods when nothing will move them, the bright sunshine, still air, and a clearing flood are substantial assets in his favour. We may admit that October and November are *the* grayling months of the year, but how much of one's pleasure is sacrificed at that season to the eternal procession of floating leaves, some of which, at almost every cast, attach themselves to line or flies ! The passer-by may also stop to wonder and question the sanity of the ardent fisherman who is wading, waist-deep perhaps, in iced water, and really enjoying every moment of it, even though the sun may be blotted out, and the

north wind bearing gray showers of snow down the valley. But there is an inspiring quality which inspires the sportsman with a keenness and desire for activity in these short, wintry days, which appeal to his instincts more acutely than the genial sunshine, beautiful as it is, of a St Martin's summer.

That day which followed the wild outburst of wind and rain was marked by no great achievement from an angler's point of view, yet it is as fresh in the memory as if it were yesterday. The stream, which had travelled from the far horizon of rusty heather, which reached like a ragged line of darkness across the sky, sinking quickly down to a lower level. Here the unseen spring muttering watery syllables as it slowly struggles through the brown leaves which lay deep in the shady dells. There the wider current gurgling and rippling intermittently as it whirls round a mossy

stump or trips over a hidden stone. And, save for these voices of the water, the hush of winter's deep dream.

But emerging from the chilling shade of the narrow valley and looking against the sun which is bathing the open fields with its starved, thin light, the air is full of moving gnats. Strange it seems that the mighty power of the frost, which is even now sheeting the edges of the moving water with ice, is impotent to quench the tiny drops of life which throb within each one of these dancing specks ! There is scarcely a ripple on the stream here. It slides, smooth and deep, between its frozen banks. But yonder the dimples of rising fish are every moment melting into the broken surface of the current. The angler, whose curiosity for observing the ways of the fishes in their natural element is as keen as his delight in trying to outwit them with rod and line, creeps cautiously to the bank. He treads with care

on the hard, resounding turf, and peers over at the little shoal of grayling floating above the red-brown gravel. The elegant formation of their bodies, the finely modelled heads, the silvery blue of the scales, the rainbow hues of the great dorsal fins, gently waving, make a combination beautiful to look at. Presently a big fellow of more than a pound weight comes sailing by, and the smaller crew respectfully make way for him. He reminds one of a stately yacht which, unexpectedly appearing, clean and white, with the romance of an unknown sea about her, makes her graceful way between a host of little pleasure-boats which glide sideways from her path, bobbing respectful curtseys as they go. A purple sheen infuses his steely flanks, and the softly fanning fins betray delicate tones of olive-green, yellow, and red.

A stealthy retreat is now made by the angler, whose covetous designs are left

unmentioned for kindly-hearted readers' sakes. But presently, with the aid of a light trout rod, the cast, which consists of a Bracken Clock, adorned with a piece of red floss silk at the tail, and a Silver Twist, is deftly pitched so that the tail fly falls gently upon the water just where the scum is eddying between the current and the further bank. Then is the grayling's opportunity to display that vigour and dash for which he is so famed, that perpendicular rise from the depths which so seldom "comes short." Surely the gamest trout that ever leapt for a March Brown, that ever sent an angler's heart into his mouth, must give way in the matter of rising to this little winter fish. For a brief instant, quick as thought, a silver flash appears near the surface of the water and is gone again. Gone, but the little rod has responded and the reel makes music as five, ten, fifteen yards of line follow the racing fish down stream.

He makes for the rapids, but is gently checked, dashes for the reedy bank and is checked again, only to return to plunge and fight in mid-water. Like a log, buoyant yet heavy, which is being tossed and turned by contending currents, he, with the aid of that powerful tail and prodigious fin, turns somersaults and repeats a series of rolling movements, much to the discomfort of the angler, who is only too conscious of the fine hold of the tiny hook in that delicate mouth, the light tackle, and the dangers of those characteristic evolutions which are so different from the fighting strategy of the trout. But in a few minutes the line is returning and the slow click of the reel tells its own tale. A full pound he weighs, and while we wonder at the fleeting glory of those rainbow tints which come and go, pulsating in infinite variety, upon the opaline sides, and again at the symmetry and grace, or at the

sweet, familiar odour of wild thyme which emanates from the still captive lying on the frozen earth, we would think rather of that hard run down-stream, of that plucky fight for liberty, than suffer any unfair comparisons to possess our thoughts.

Let unfriendly critics say their worst, the grayling is a *Salmo*—a family honoured among fishes. He provides us with sport when salmon and trout are out of season. He is a game fish and a beautiful one withal. The angler whose beat extends into the country of grayling streams need never hang up his rod when melancholy leaves are falling and bemoan a season gone; never need crawl into his shell and sigh, "Call me when the trout season opens again." Even though we may admit that the grayling lacks some of the incomparable qualities of the trout, who loves the loveliest of surroundings and who is seen at his best

when spring is unfolding her tender treasures, the honest angler cannot but have a deep regard for the silvery little fellows who prepare themselves for a winter of activity and life when the remnants of the year are smouldering away, and the streams slide so coldly and sadly through leafless woods.

Turning towards home in the crisp winter evening, when the last stain of crimson has melted away in the blue-green sky and the pale stars come out, the fisherman will, perhaps, give a kindly thought to that astute folk—the monks—who, it is said, introduced the grayling into the streams which water the fertile lands in which they raised their stately abbeys. It may be that he will think too of good old Linnæus, who christened the grayling *Salmo thymallus*—that is, if he loves the wild thyme and the wild moors which nourish it, as every true angler should. And we would

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pardon his enthusiasm if he reached a friendly hand back through the ages to St Ambrose, who, with a grateful heart, called the sweet-scented grayling "the Flower of the Fishes."



LAST DAYS

OR, THE SONG OF THE SEDGE-BIRD



At the close of day, when the summer sun was setting behind the low and distant hills, an old man might often have been seen comfortably seated at the door of a thatch-roofed cottage that overlooked a wide expanse of mud and sand. His kindly face, illuminated by the rich, warm glow of the western sky, gave expression to that serenity of mind which is begotten of a long and close communion with Nature's consoling spirit. The weathered features, in which were written the great calm of the sea, the deep sympathy of the silent sunlit meadows, the reposeful hush of the lonely hills; the "old experienced coat, hanging long and straight and brown" from the bended shoulders; the ancient hat, bleached with the ocean's spray and the

mountain wind, clinging to the silvered head, as if with an endearing tenacity; and, not the least, the tattered, faded remnants of the once bravely coloured flies which encircled it, lent a kindly pathos to the closing pages of the good old angler's life.

From the dry banks, where the fearless rabbits played, to the far horizon beyond the wide estuary the shallow pools that were left by the receding tide reflected the fiery sky, and the dark forms of curlew moved restlessly across the lane of light. The broad leaves of hollyhocks brushed against the white walls of the cottage as the tall stalks swayed in the breeze that came from the sea, and the gray reeds whispered a low response as they surged in fleeting harmonies of sombre colour across the dreary marshlands.

Peacefully "Old Peter" sat and watched those ever-changing lights in

that wonderful western sky while he smoked the peace-pipe of his eventide in the land that he loved. So peacefully, indeed, that had he been asked to write his own epitaph, now that the evening of his life was far spent and the shadow of night was nigh, he might, with a not unwilling heart, have written thus :

“ If fate should say, ‘Thy course is run,’
It would not make me sad ;
All that I wished to do is done,
All that I would have, had.”

His thoughts would often, on such occasions, slowly wander back to the days when he was a boy, splashing for troutlets in the mountain stream, or to the time when, long ago, he chased the corncrake in the meadows where the glistening buttercups and wild forget-me-nots grew. And it was with a gratified rather than a longing spirit that he dreamed of those hours again. For years he had led a lonely but not an

unhappy life, and now Nature led him gently down the path of Time. A recluse, he was often called, an irresponsible wanderer who had chosen to shun the ways of his fellow-men. This because he worshipped Nature's God through Nature, rather than bow to the dictations of some petty sect. To him everything in Nature proclaimed another life, another joy. He felt that every autumn leaf would live again in some glad spring-time. "There is a budding morrow in midnight," he used to say; and the changing seasons, the flowering of plants, the coming of the summer birds were his saints' days, wherein his soul found its peace and abiding comfort.

Yet he was not now alone, for suddenly his hand, which he had let fall over the side of the bench upon which he sat, moved involuntarily. Yarrow, his old sheep-dog, had touched it with her cold nose, and, looking up into her master's

face with her soft brown eyes, was saying as plainly as she could, "It's getting cold, and it's time to be going in." And so it was. A white mist was gathering over the far-away flats, and creeping up the gorge through which the mountain stream rushed over its stony course to the tidal river. One by one the spectral herons glided slowly out of the dim distance and alighted silently on the edge of the incoming tide. There they stalked, gray and ghost-like, or stood motionless on one leg. Around their quiet forms flocks of sea-gulls whirled, uttering their weird and plaintive cries. They shrieked and gabbled at each other as they fought for the food which the tide brought in, and ever and anon a shelduck would join in the clamour with a succession of laughing quacks. Then the curlews became vociferous as they prepared to start for the uplands, and when the sedge-bird in the reed-beds

trilled out its evening song, and the still backwaters held the passing glints of day, "Old Peter" entered his cottage, closing the door against the coming night.

"You've aye been an auld friend to me, Yarrow," he said; and the dog wagged her tail approvingly, and indicated by rubbing her nose into the palm of her master's hand that she wanted a petting. Then "Old Peter" would take her head in both his bronzed hands and rub her soft cheeks and silken ears, to which she would respond with a half growl, half whimper, and conclude by jumping up and gently touching his face with her tongue. It was a kiss of affection, and the old man felt that it was.

Still the sedge-bird sang on, out in the quiet darkness. It was a solitary yet companionable sound, and when it ceased "Old Peter" would listen intent-

ly for it to begin again. He used to wander out to look for the bird whenever the white moon rose above the rugged pine-woods behind the cottage, hoping to see it singing; but when he approached too near it ceased, and recommenced further away. After a while he became so entranced by the song that he could not go indoors in the evening until the little bird had commenced. Faithful Yarrow soon got to know that, and if her master did not show signs of moving after he had heard the first faint trill, she would arouse him with her cold, wet nose and pleading eyes.

“Old Peter” could remember how the sedge-bird used to awaken the stillness of the evening valleys in the far-away days in the heart of the green country, but now the notes, familiar as they were, came to him with a strange new meaning. They suggested associations to him that flickered dimly in

the twilight of his fading memory, and the desire to approach and to see the little singer became stronger and stronger, although he had so often seen others like it before. Then the song grew upon him and possessed his soul, occupying his mind so fully that he was seldom really happy except when listening to it. And he felt again, now in the eventide of his years, the weight of those sweet sorrows which is the burden so willingly borne by all those who have learned to love one another. The older he became, the longer grew the nights, so much the more sweetly did the voice of the sedge-bird speak to him. And he prayed that the secret which was hidden from him might be revealed, saying, as he thought of the still hours when he would be sleeping, and of the returning morrow when the reeds would be silent in the sun :

“Come to me in my dreams, and then
By day I shall be well again !

For then the night will more than pay
The hopeless longing of the day."

"Old Peter" was a fisherman, and few men had had a wider experience in the art than he, for he did not confine himself to the salmon, trout, or sewin of the mountain stream, but in the off-season there was always some sport to be had in the salt waters of the estuary, or the sea beyond. Still, the old angler loved beyond all the rapid rivers and heathery moors, and every year, for more seasons than are given to most men, he fished for trout, traversing the course of the stream from its lowest reaches to the bleak, black tarn that lay motionless and sunless in the shadows of the great hills.

The flies he made for the rivers of the district were so well known that there were few anglers who visited the place without consulting the old man on his "favourite patterns." Yarrow was of

the greatest assistance to him in this branch of the art, for she could catch the stealthy corncrake as it glided through the meadow grass, or pounce upon a mallard when the flocks came into the backwaters in the dusk of evening. Sometimes, too, when "Old Peter" was fishing on the moors, the dog would bring him a grouse which she had sprung upon as it crouched in the heather. And so the old angler laid by a store of feathers to be tied into flies during winter evenings or hours of leisure.

Although his power of endurance was still remarkable, although he could still feel and enjoy the thrill of

"The running line, the straining rod," his fishing gradually became, as it has done with so many others, "a sort of solemn sacrament and withdrawal from the world, just as the aged read their Bibles." And there came a time when those who knew him noticed that his

angling excursions were becoming perceptibly shorter. He was tired by the time he reached the brink of the moor, and then he would often turn to look back over these purple plains, hoping that when his last evening came he would be there to wave a farewell to the scene that he loved while the music of the water still sounded in his ears. And never did the lonely sedge-bird's song bear a sweeter message than in these last days. The old angler would await its coming in the early season of the March Brown, when the budding bog-myrtle lay like a lake of crimson amid the wintry rushes of the hill-swamps. He would think of it as he trudged wearily home, and listen eagerly for it to begin in the reeds which shivered in the evening wind. The warbling would sometimes pierce the gathering darkness with a loud and impatient tone, then it would suddenly sink into silence

and break out again into a cadence of soft, imploring notes, blent with a pathos that went straight to the old man's heart, making it heavy and sad. Like the soul of some sweet music long since dead it came, singing of the old, old days when

“Love was warm and youth was young,”
of smiles and tears, vain longings and regrets, and of that golden thread of happiness unspeakable which entwined them all.

One hot day in summer the old angler was fishing where the trees grow small and the moor is in sight. Never before had the great sun seemed to shine on so beautiful an earth, but little did “Old Peter” think that he would not be by his cottage door to watch it set that night. The peat-stained water danced merrily over the rocks, and the sweet air was full of the hum of the wild mountain bee. Crimson heath clung to the grey, lichened boulders, and blue-

bells nodded in the breeze, or lay prostrate in the long, rich grass. The distant mountains were veiled in a violet mist, and through the "honied heather" the little stream lay like a ribbon of the heaven's own blue, quivering idly in the summer heat. A profound peace dwelt upon all things, and the old fisherman felt that it was good to have lived on such a day.

Before noon the trout had almost ceased rising, yet "Old Peter" fished slowly on, knowing that the higher up he went so much the better would the sport become. A few hours later the sun became obscured by a passing cloud, and the latter drifted along until it hung over the mountain-tops. The violet mist now changed to gray, and the stream lost its brightness. A slight breeze suddenly swept across the moor, tossing the hummocks of heather as it passed, dying away again with a sigh in the distance.

Now, from afar, there came a sound like the rushing of a gale through the naked woods of winter. Louder and still louder it became, until it resembled the raging of the sea, beating against some ragged cliff. The hills were blotted out, the heavens enveloped in cloud, and the darkening moors trembled under that distant, thunderous roaring. "Old Peter" heard the warning and knew all that it meant. On any other occasion he would have fled for his life to the nearest bank, but just as the water welled up to his feet and covered the sun-dried gravel, the song of the sedge-bird broke clear above the rumbling of the coming spate. The old man started and was transfixed. For a moment he listened as if unconscious of the imminent danger. Then in a savage, surging torrent there came the wave of murky water, almost filling from bank to bank the little gorge, carrying with

it masses of heather, peat, and fencing rails, and rolling the heavy blocks of stone before it like autumn leaves blown down a forest path.

And "Old Peter" did bid a farewell to the stream and the moors that he loved. A few moments before he had seen them in their most enchanting and kindly aspects, and, with the warbling of the sedge-bird still ringing imploringly in his ears, he passed away upon the smooth flood of that wide river which flows everlastingly. And the Great Secret was revealed.

.

Very many years ago, when the world was much younger, a boy and a girl were walking in the summer meadows. Neither of them spoke for a long while, but they went on and on until their shoes were yellow with the golden dust of the buttercups. They watched the

trout dimpling the surface of the deep pools that reflected the green of the overhanging foliage, and listened to the measured plashing of the old water-mill down in the wooded gorge. They felt no desire to talk. A deep, eternal love is always silent, because there is no language by which it can be expressed. Yet in that silence there lies a sympathy and complete understanding that speaks more fully, more lovingly, than any words.

At last the boy said, "Do you know what I believe?"

"No!"

"That I knew you and you knew me ages before we ever saw each other."

"You are a funny boy," she replied, smiling. "What can make you think of such things?"

But without attempting to answer the question, he went on: "I'm sure you and I were daisies, or buttercups,

or something, hundreds of years ago, and that we were growing in these fields side by side."

"And do you think that everybody was something else a long time ago?" she asked, getting interested.

"Yes, all those people who really love each other must have been doing so since the beginning of the world, only they didn't always know it," he said.

"And are all these flowers and birds going to be somebody one day, do you think?"

"I'm sure they are, and many of them have been people before, especially all those which grow close together and blossom at the same time. When a person dies, or even goes away from the place he loves, his spirit comes back again to the old fields and lives again as one of the flowers or the birds he liked the best."

"That is a sweet idea," she said. . . .
"I'd rather be a bird than a flower, be-

cause they can sing and fly about, and they do seem so happy always."

They had been sitting on the stump of a fallen tree, and as the girl got up to go, she said, "I shouldn't like to be a May-fly; don't they only live about half a day?"

"Yes," he replied, "and that one only lived about half a minute. Did you see how that old trout went for it? . . . Now, lassie," the boy exclaimed, placing his hand on her shoulder, "I know what bird you would like to be—a sedge-bird!"

"How do you know?"

"Because you are always wandering down by the river in the spring, waiting and listening for it to come. I believe you welcome it even more than you do the swallows."

"Well! it's such a merry little bird . . . although it does sometimes sound lonely when it sings by itself all night long."

"If your lassie went away," the girl

said at length, turning her face away,
“and you never saw her for a long, long
time, for years, perhaps, would you
learn to be fond of the little sedge-bird,
too, until she came back to you?”

He saw that her eyes dimmed for a
moment, and she shyly put her hand into
his. Again there was silence, and he
gave her the one response which only
loving hearts can ever understand.

And we know that he did learn to love
the little gray-brown bird, although it
was a long time before he really knew
why he did so. But now, when the song
is no longer heard in the rustling reeds,
and Yarrow's sleeping sighs are for
ever hushed, we may believe that the
boy and the girl will meet again in the
old familiar fields of their childhood,

“And she to him will reach her hand,
And gazing in his eyes will stand,
And know her friend, and weep for glee,
And cry: ‘*Long, long, I’ve looked for thee.*’”

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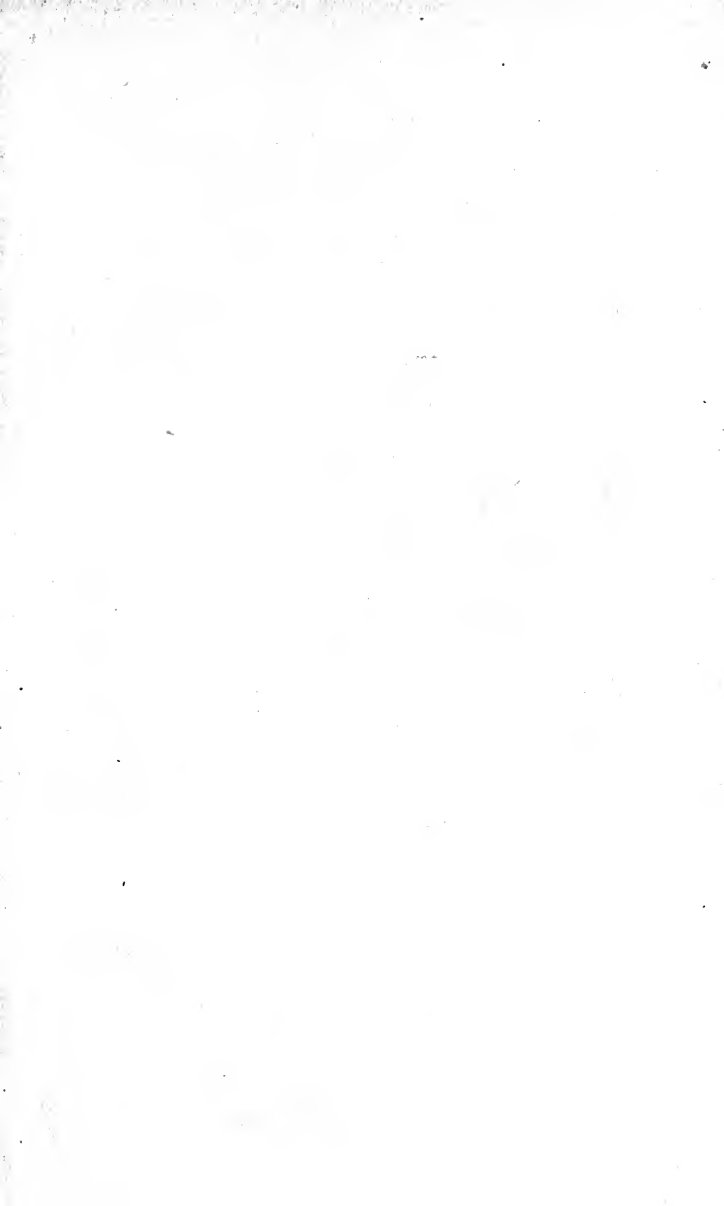
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